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DEFENDING A HOME.

BY

E. A. YOUNG,

Author of "The Fugitives of Pearl Hill," Etc.

No. 31.



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J. S. OGILVIE, PUBLISHER,

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DEFENDING A HOME.

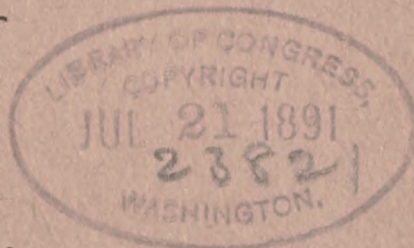
A NOVEL.

BY E. A. YOUNG,

Author of "The Fugitives of Pearl Hill," Etc., Etc.

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DEFENDING A HOME.

CHAPTER I.

TRACKS IN THE FOREST.

Toward the close of a sultry August day in the year 1754 two boys paused on the brow of a low hill and looked across at the wooded slopes beyond. There, curling above the highest treetops, the eldest noticed a thin wreath of smoke.

"Does that come from our chimney, Rube?" he asked.

"Mother must be cooking a big lot of supper for us if it does," said the other. For, as they looked, the smoke suddenly increased in volume and became almost as black as the thunder clouds that lay along the western horizon.

"That is beyond our cabin at least a mile," said the elder. "And," he added, as the smoke rose in a dense volume, "no chimney ever sent up such a smoke as that unless the soot got afire. What can it be?"

"One of the new settlers burning stumps," Rube suggested.

"Perhaps it is, though it isn't in the direction of Pontoosuc." (The present city of Pittsfield, Mass.)

"But we can't stop to find out what a strange smoke means. Mother will be anxious if we don't get home by sundown, and you must carry in a bucket of water. I left the bucket at the spring."

"You can carry the water yourself, Si," said Rube. For an average boy of one hundred and

thirty-five years ago liked to shirk disagreeable tasks just the same as he does to-day. And Rube Fowler was in many respects, at least, an average boy.

"The one that gets to the spring last must carry the bucket; that's fair," was Si's way of settling the dispute. And without waiting for Rube to agree to the suggestion he started down the slope at his best speed.

His companion bounded in pursuit, and although he was only thirteen and his brother two years older, it was evident that Rube was the fastest runner. Besides he was a trifle angry at Si's way of taking the advantage. As if to punish the latter for his unfairness he tripped and fell just as he reached the edge of the woods.

"Now, who'll fetch the water?" Rube triumphantly cried, as he leaped nimbly over his companion and darted on ahead.

Si rose deliberately to his feet and made no attempt to regain the lost advantage. He was naturally slow of movement, as he was of speech, and it was seldom that he tried to compete with his brothers in feats of agility.

The spring was situated about half-way betwixt the edge of the natural clearing and the Fowler cabin, and a few moments' walking brought Si to the tree on a broken limb of which the bucket usually hung. But the pail was not there.

"If Rube has hid it, he'll have to come back after the water, that's all," said the boy in his drawling tones. Then he turned toward the spring, which bubbled forth from underneath a huge rock-maple tree, and bent over it to obtain a drink.

As he knelt on a protruding root he saw something that made him forget his thirst. For where the water usually welled forth with crystal clearness, a chunk of rotten and worm-eaten wood had been thrust, turning the current from its course and tainting its purity.

"If Rube did that, he deserves—but Rube didn't do it!" Si exclaimed, his brown cheeks flushing with indignation.

He tried to remove the obstruction with his hands, but it was wedged in too tightly to be so easily displaced. Then, in looking about him for a stick to pry with, he noticed what he might have observed in the first place had he suspected anything to be wrong. There were large, broad footprints in the soft clay around the spring.

"They are bigger than Lem's tracks," the boy audibly reflected.

He had lived long enough in the backwoods to gain a little of the art of following a trail, although he would have been easily baffled had the maker of the tracks made any attempt to conceal them.

They led him by a short detour to the small clearing where the Fowler cabin stood. The unknown had paused behind a large tree on the edge of the clearing, where, as it appeared, a somewhat lengthy observation of the log house and its surroundings had been taken. Si judged the latter fact by the depth of the footprints in the mellow leaf mold, which showed that the position of the feet had not been changed for a considerable period.

Further examination discovered indications that the person who had placed the rotten wood in the spring had moved from one sheltering tree to another at different points along the edge of the opening, evidently for the purpose of making a very minute observation of the premises.

Si Fowler, as has been hinted, was very deliberate in everything he did, and he was likewise slow in coming to a conclusion. Finding at length that to follow the trail further would take him away into the forest, he stepped out into the clearing and approached the house.

"You needn't think I shall go back after the water, Si, for I shan't, if we don't have any for a

week!" Rube exclaimed from the doorway as the other drew near.

"Where's Lem?" Si demanded, so gravely that Rube scented something wrong.

"Hasn't got home yet. But what do you want of him? And what made you so long coming? It is more than half an hour since I left you behind."

"I wish Lem was here, Rube. Go in and tell mother that some rubbish got into the spring, and that I have got to clean it out before I can get any water."

Rube started to obey, but Si recalled him, adding in his most careless drawl:

"Fetch me the other bucket and my gun. I may get sight of the critter that filled up the spring."

When Rube returned their mother followed him to the door. But Si had sauntered some distance away from the house, to avoid the anxious questioning which he was sure the matronly heart would be prompted to make.

"Come straight back, soon as you git the water, Si," she called after him. "Like enough it was a bear that did the mischief, and bears are ugly critters. So mind what I say, and don't try to foller any tracks to-night."

This was spoken in a tone of command, and those backwoods mothers of a century and more ago were accustomed to exact as implicit obedience from boys of Si's age as fathers were. In this respect, at least, it might be as well if the mothers of these days were more like their ancestors.

"I won't follow any bear tracks," Si answered back over his shoulder, as Rube came up with the gun and bucket.

"Was it a bear? Did you get a sight at him?" Rube eagerly questioned, walking along at his brother's side.

"I didn't see any bear, and don't expect to to-night," was Si's slow-spoken reply.

"What did you see, then? Why can't you tell a

feller?" Rube persisted, impatiently tugging at Si's arm.

"I didn't see anything, excepting some tracks, and I don't care to follow them alone. I wish"—and Si paused at the edge of the clearing to examine his musket—"that Lem would come. I don't think it's just right to have father and Lem off at the same time."

"I'll go back and stay with marm and Sue and Davey if you're afeared on their account," said Rube, with sudden willingness, which even Silas' wits were not too slow to understand.

"You had better, especially if you're afeared to go with me. It will soon begin to grow dark in the woods, Rube, and you can't cover up your head with a bed quilt out here, same as you do nights after you've gone to bed!"

This remark of Si's touched Rube in a sensitive spot. In the daytime he was as courageous as are most boys of his age. But that he would nearly smother himself with the bed coverings every night after the candle was extinguished in the rude cabin loft was a fact which he was very stout in denying in the daylight.

But Si's mysterious manner had given Rube sensations of real alarm, and he was in no mood, there on the edge of the darkening forest, to protest against the oft-repeated ridicule from his steady-nerved brother.

"Shall I send Lem to help you if he comes afore you get back?" Rube asked, beginning to walk backward with his face to the woods.

"L-L-Lem is here already!" stammered a voice so close at his side that it made him jump.

Si had been so intent priming his musket that he had not noticed the approach of the elder brother. Lem had entered the clearing from the opposite side, and, observing the boys, had hastened to join them without stopping at the cabin.

He was a remarkably stalwart youth for his sev-

enteen years, being fully six feet in height, and with a well-proportioned figure. His homespun clothes were rather a snug fit, indicating that he was still growing.

His smooth, frank face wore a look of extreme anxiety. He had evidently been running, for his cheeks were streaked with perspiration. As he stood facing Rube he held his hands behind him, and as the younger boy advanced eagerly to welcome him he shook his head forbiddingly.

"Hurry b-b-back to the house, Rube, and tell marm I'll be right along. I'll go with S-S-Si to the spring," he said, in a tone that met with ready obedience.

Not until Rube had reached the dwelling did Lem bring his hands round in front of him, displaying to the astonished gaze of Si the broken stock of his own musket.

"What in the world has happened, Lem?" was Si's eager question.

"There's Indians on the w-w-war path," was the answer. "They've b-b-burned a settler's cabin two miles south of here. And, Si, I've had a t-t-tussle with one of 'em myself. That's how my m-m-musket come to be b-b-broke!"

Thus the big smoke and the reconnoitering tracks around the clearing were explained.

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING FOR THE DEFENCE.

“Which got the best of the fight? He didn’t kill you, anyhow,” exclaimed Silas.

“W-we had better be getting the water while we can,” said Lem, who, as will be noticed, stammered worse than usual when excited. Sometimes, when he was especially eager to speak, it would take a long time for him to articulate the first word. He always stuck at the first letter.

“We’ll talk as we go along. It was about a mile from here that I m-m-met the r-r-redskin. We were f-f-face to f-f-face before either of us saw t’other. I d-d-didn’t know but he was friendly till he came at me with his tomahawk. He f-f-flung that, but it missed me, and then, afore I could l-level my gun, he was too nigh for me to shoot. So I struck at him with the stock, and hit his head and a t-t-tree at the same time. The varmint ran off, yelling like a w-w-w-wildcat. I guess the tree and the gun got the w-w-worst of it, but I didn’t wait to see, for I was afeared the yelling would fetch more redskins. I r-r-run every step of the way to our clearing, and it m-m-made me sweat.”

By this time the brothers had reached the spring, and with the barrel of the broken musket for a bar the chunk of rotten wood was pried out.

The current quickly washed away the fragments of wood and the bucket was filled. Lem found the other completely demolished lying in a by-path.

“Whose cabin was that burned?” questioned Si.

“I don’t know. I saw it burning from the top of the hill and the redskins running about near it. Like enough the inmates g-g-got away.”

"It'll be our turn next, and father away, as he always is. I don't see why he was so set on building so far from a settlement. He is always bound to do just the thing that marm and the rest of us don't want him to."

"Father is a q-q-queer man." As he said this Lem proceeded to examine the tracks about which Silas had already told him.

"I'll t-t-tell you what, Si," said Lem, when he had satisfied himself of the character of the tracks. The best thing we can do is to get ready for a f-f-fight."

"You think it was a hostile redskin that has been prowling around our clearing?"

"Not very f-f-friendly to put that wood in the spring and sm-m-mashing the bucket, was it? Come along with the water and g-g-give me the gun."

Si obeyed and they hurried back to the cabin.

They were met at the door by their mother. Lem briefly explained their peril.

"We might flee to Pontoosuc if it wasn't so fur," was her first suggestion, spoken with such firmness of voice that one would have thought she felt only the slightest fear.

"S-s-safer to stay here and fight it out," was Lem's verdict.

"We mayn't have to fight at all, Lemuel. I've never left off prayin' for the Lord to take care on us, and He's allus been merciful, and I don't believe He'll forsake us now when we need him most."

Something of the simple faith, as well as the courage, of this backwoods mother fell like a mantle upon her boys. Yet they understood that they could look for divine protection only in return for their own exertions.

"You had better f-f-fetch another bucket of water, Si. And Rube can carry in plenty of firewood, for we may have to keep p-p-pretty close for a day or two. That won't take him out of the clearing. It's beginning to get d-d-d-dark in the woods,

and if the r-r-redskins mean to visit us to-night they'll begin to p-p-prowl round soon. Come, S-Si, see if you can't h-h-hurry for once."

Lem seized an ax and led the way along the path leading to the spring. He accompanied Si only part way, however.

"Hurry along," he said, as he paused near a young white oak tree whose trunk was about six inches in diameter and as straight as an arrow.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Si as Lem's ax was struck into the hard wood with a ringing sound.

"I'm going to c-c-cut it down, Silas. Now f-f-fill your b-bucket and don't ask questions."

Si obeyed, in his deliberate fashion. Lem felled the tree with a few strong, practiced strokes, then trimmed and cut off about an eight-foot length of the largest part of the trunk.

To raise this to his shoulder was all he could do, for it was almost as heavy as a bar of iron. He had just got it balanced, and picked up the ax with his other hand, when a startling sound broke the silence. It was the report of a musket.

At the same instant rapid footsteps approached, and he saw Si advancing with the bucket of water in one hand and smoking gun in the other.

"Make for the cabin, Lem!" he cried. "I've shot a redskin."

"D-d-drop your bucket—you can't run with that," said Lem, striking into a trot.

But Si tenaciously clung to the bucket and contents, and kept close to the heels of his brother.

They had scarcely reached the edge of the clearing when they were thrilled by a loud whoop in their rear, the significance of which they knew only too well.

"D-d-drop your bucket!" reiterated Lem.

"Then throw away your load," panted Si.

And so they both pushed on, resolutely clinging

to their burdens, not even the bucketful of water or the ax being relinquished.

They reached the cabin simultaneously, and Rube opened the door for them.

The sun had sunk behind the hills some time ago, and the clearing was lit up by a dull red glow faintly reflected from the clouds to the eastward.

To the south of the cabin stretched a level strip of meadow land, with a small branch of the Housatonic River flowing through it. And there, waving in the light August breeze, within plain view from the cabin door, was a field of corn planted by these sturdy backwoods boys.

It was the sight of this fruit of their toil that caused the boys to pause on the threshold, heedless of a possible shot from the forest.

"I suppose they'll cut down every stock of corn," said Si.

"And l-l-level the rye, too. The v-v-varmints will manage to starve out before winter the settlers they don't kill. But all we can do is to make the best f-f-fight we c-can."

"What in the world be you going to do with that stick, Lemuel?" his brother exclaimed, as the youth let his burden fall with a heavy thump on the floor.

"He dot it to punch de Induns wiv!" was the suggestion of little Davey, which made Rube laugh and the others smile. And, little realizing the dreadful peril that menaced him in his helplessness, he clapped his hands in glee.

Davey was at the rude table, eating his supper of bread and milk. Sue, the oldest of the family was getting supper for her brothers. She was graceful and pretty, and still her face betrayed nothing like the feminine timidity which we are accustomed to expect in young women of the present day. Indeed, Susan Fowler had a musket of her own, and was the best shot of the family, excepting Lem, who was a more than common marksman.

"I got the stick to brace the door with, but I m-m-may have to use it as D-D-Davey s-s-says."

Lem noticed the milk his little brother was eating, and abruptly turned to Rube.

"The c-c-cow?"

"About time to see if she has come up to the shed," drawled Silas.

"Better to let the cow go than to expose yourselves," admonished Sue, with the same calm, good sense that characterized the speech of the mother.

"W-w-we must save her if we can. When it comes to g-g-giving things up then we'll l-let 'm go, and not afore."

Lem led the way, followed by Si. A rude shed was built against one side of the cabin, but as the latter had only one door, the out-building could be entered only by going outside. They found the cow in front of the shed door, unconcernedly chewing her cud.

Lem took her by a horn, while Si opened the door. At that moment the boys, who all the while kept a sharp lookout along the dark face of the forest, saw a bright stream of fire spurt out.

With a low of mingled pain and fright the cow wheeled away from the shed, frantically struggling to break from the grasp of Lem.

"She's hit, she's hit!" cried he, springing forward and trying to seize the other horn.

"T-t-take off your j-j-jacket and throw it over her h-h-h——"

In his excitement Lem's tongue was more unruly than ever. But Si was quick to comprehend his purpose, and the garment was thrown over the animal's face, effectually blindfolding her.

"N-n-now make f-for the shed," stammered Lem.

Blindfolded, the cow was as willing to go in that direction as any other, and in a moment she was under cover and the door closed.

"B-b-back into the house q-quick!"

Si started first, Lem followed. A few bounds and they were at the door. No shot was heard this time, but something whisked over their heads and struck in the logs over the door, where it quivered for an instant like a living thing.

It was an Indian arrow. Lem reached up, plucked it from the log and entered the cabin.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

Lem did not secure the arrow because it was a curiosity to him, for the resident Indians in that locality, who had for many years been on friendly terms with the white settlers, had made presents of fine bows and arrows to both Rube and Si. One young Indian in particular, known as Winawis, was a frequent visitor at the cabin, and he took especial pride in his handicraft, some specimen of which, in the shape of an ingenious toy for Davey, he was sure to bring whenever he came.

The reader will observe that the date of the occurrences I am describing was over twenty years before the war for American independence. For many years there had been almost continuous war between England and France. Therefore the hostilities between the two nations extended to their colonies in America.

Canada was settled by the French, and emissaries were sent among the Indians in the New England colonies to incite them to burn and destroy the English settlements. Since the great Indian war, known in history as King Philip's war, which occurred seventy-five years before the events of this story, nearly all of the Massachusetts Indians were friendly to the white settlers. Therefore, the savage allies of the French came mostly from New Hampshire and westward.

There had been a short interval of comparative peace, and during that period several settlements sprung up along the beautiful valley of the Housatonic.

For two months the settlers in some localities had

been harrassed by the French and Indians, who lurked in the forest ready to attack the most defenseless points. Men at work in the fields had been killed, several cabins were burned and a few prisoners taken by the Indians. But since the Fowler cabin was quite remote from any settlement, and all communication along the frontier slow and difficult, the Fowlers were first warned of their peril by the events just described.

Probably none of them fully realized the extent of their danger. All the Indians with whom they had come in contact were friendly. So it was hard to realize that a redskin with the pipe of peace and a redskin on the warpath were wholly different creatures.

Lem had plucked the arrow from the log because he was sure he recognized its workmanship. There were two notches cut near the feather end of the missile ; and this was the trademark, so to speak, of the afore-mentioned Winawis.

"What is it ? What is it ?" chorused Rube and Si, while tall Lem held the object of interest high above their reach.

He stripped off a slip of birch bark and held it close to the flickering candle on the table. The bark had been tied to the arrow and had writing upon it.

"It is from father," Lem announced.

"What does he say ? Where is he ? Did he shoot the arrow ?"

In these rapid queries even Sue and her mother joined. Lem read the message aloud, which was as follows :

You have nothing to fear from the Indians tonight. I will be with you in an hour or two, and tell you what to do.

JOSIAH FOWLER.

"Good ! good !" exclaimed Rube, fairly jumping up and down in the sudden transition from fear to a sense of comparative security.

"Is that all he says?" asked Mrs. Fowler, staring with a perplexed countenance at the message. For in those days even the limited ability to read and write were not thought so essential as now, and it must be confessed that this sturdy pioneer mother knew how to do neither.

"That is all, and I d-d-don't see as it amounts to a h-h-hickory——"

"Hush, Lemuel! Don't speak in that way of your father. If he says he will come, of course he he will, and we must be patient."

"He is always c-c-coming, but never c-c-comes. He is always going to d-d-do wonders, but never d-does 'em. I've about lost f-f-faith in him, and I can't help s-s-saying so."

"That is one of Winawis' arrows," drawled Silas, examining it in his deliberate way.

"Then he and pa are together," exclaimed Rube, for he had not lived nor reasoned long enough to lose confidence in a parent who, as has been hinted, was a peculiar man.

"If they are it is some encouragement, for they may be working for our safety in a way that we shall know when we see them," was the hopeful rejoinder of Sue.

"What does he s-s-say we've nothing to fear for, when one of the varmints f-f-fired at us not f-five minutes ago? It was n-no good will that made the bullet h-hit the c-c-cow instead of Si or me."

"Perhaps pa didn't shoot the arrow at all. It may be a decoy," suggested Si.

"It is his writing and he sent it. B-b-but——"

"Well, Lemuel, what have you thought of now?"

"He may be a p-p-prisoner and forced to w-w-w-write the message."

"Would he do that, Lemuel, knowing it might be used as a decoy? You must be fair to'ards him. He wouldn't help our enemies if he knew it."

"Perhaps not, if he kn-n-n-new it."

"And he must know whether there's real danger or not. We must wait, and hope for the best. Your father is a brave man, at any rate, and if he comes to help us he'll make a stout fight, you may depend on't."

"We'll k-k-keep a lookout, just the same," said Lem. He barred the heavy door and set the oaken brace against it.

"S-S-Si, you look out towards the cornfield, Rube can l-l-look across the south side of the clearing, and I'll make a general observation of the f-f-forest front."

Lem's directions were carried out, but no signs of the enemy were discovered.

"Keep a sharp l-l-lookout on all sides, boys. I must m-m-milk the cow."

"How are you goin' to get to her?" Rube asked.

"I'm going to do what father s-s-said he would do when we built the cabin a year ago. Cut a door through the w-w-wall into the shed, so we won't have to g-g-go outside."

"That'll take all night, won't it?"

"I'll make a hole b-b-big enough to c-c-crawl through, and make the rest of the door when I have t-t-time."

Lem seized the ax, which he knew so well how to wield, and began to chop through one of the logs on the side of the cabin next to the shed. His blows caused the dwelling to tremble from roof to floor. But it was stanchly built, and the timbers were so heavy that there was no danger of mischief to the building.

A section of one log was soon removed, and Lem attacked another with vigorous strokes. But before it was cut through an exclamation from Rube caused him to drop the axe and hurry to the lookout.

"S-s-somebody creeping across the clearing, c-coming this way," announced Lem.

"I guess father is going to keep his word," said Si. Mrs. Fowler, with an air of eagerness which pro-

claimed more than ordinary interest in one of her placid habit, hurried to the side of her stalwart son.

"It is him ! It is Josiah !" she breathlessly exclaimed after a single glance through the small square aperture which served the double purpose of loophole and lookout.

She was right. The creeping figure made its way straight to the cabin door, and a well-known voice said :

"Let me in, quick !"

"It's your father, Lemuel. Open the door before the Indians fire on him."

In another moment Josiah Fowler stood in the midst of an eager group in the cabin, assailed by a dozen questions uttered all in a breath.

He was a muscular man of medium height, clean-shaven, and with remarkably keen black eyes. To judge his character from his countenance would have been a difficult matter. His family knew him as a man who was never willing to make their home long in one place, and always unwilling to build a habitation in or very near a settlement. He made frequent hunting excursions, but seldom brought home any game. Though never directly unkind to his wife or children, he seemed to take little pleasure in their society.

He rarely used his authority toward his sons ; but when he had done so a single word was sufficient to bring obedience.

"Don't fasten the door so tight, Lemuel," were almost the first words he spoke, after a hasty greeting.

"Why n-n-not ?" Lem demanded. He had closed and bolted the door and was in the act of replacing the oaken brace.

"Because it is no use. We have got to surrender. The woods are full of hostile Indians, with Frenchmen for leaders. If we give up peaceably we will be well treated. If we resist we shall be butchered like so many sheep."

Every face, save one, paled at these words. That one was Lem's.

"H-h-how do you know all this?" he demanded.

"If I do know that is enough. It isn't likely I would advise you to do anything that I didn't think was best. Unbar the door and I will answer for your safety."

Lem's hand was on the oaken stick, and he glanced first at his mother and then at Sue. They looked perplexed, and, seeing their doubts settled his own into conviction. He resolutely dropped the brace into position.

"What do you mean, Lemuel? I must be obeyed," said Mr. Fowler, more sharply than they had ever heard him speak before.

"I m-m-mean, s-sir, that other things don't come out as you p-p-promise, and t-t-too much depends now to make any m-m-mistake. We'll stay and t-t-ake our chances."

Mr. Fowler stared for a moment in angry astonishment. Then he seized the brace, flung it aside and sprang to the door.

"H-h-hands off!" cried Lem, and he drew his father backward.

"Lemuel! Lemuel! Be careful what you do!" was the warning chorused by mother and sister, while Si and Rube looked on in silence.

As soon as Lem had drawn his father away from the door he released him and stepped back to the brace.

He had never before presumed to oppose paternal authority. "Children, obey your parents," was in those days observed as the first law of the home, and it was not so often transgressed without cause as now. But the time had come with Lemuel Fowler when it seemed to him that he must disobey one parent that he might defend the other.

As I have stated, Mr. Fowler did not often dictate to his children, but this was all the greater reason for their standing a little in awe of him; for nothing

weakens authority so much as the too frequent use of it. - Therefore Rube and Si, as well as Sue and their mother, almost held their breaths when Lem had thus openly defied his father, for they dared not think of the consequences.

Mr. Fowler turned about and stood for moment as though a little dazed by the resistance he had met with. Then he advanced and again laid his hand on the brace.

"Josiah!" exclaimed his wife, coming forward in her quiet manner.

"Stand away from the door, Lemuel," he said, so harshly that it did not sound like his voice at all.

"N-n-not unless mother says so, t-t-too," was the firm response.

"She had better say so, then. Do you think I would surrender if it wasn't best? Haven't I made sacrifices enough for you all, and worked hard enough to make a home for you to deserve your confidence?"

"You have m-m-made homes enough if you only k-k-kept 'em," said Lem, drily.

"What do you mean by that?"

"You have kept us shifting from one p-p-place to another ever s-s-since I can remember."

"I have moved from poor land on to better, and have always made money by the change."

"P-p-perhaps you have; but I d-d-dont see what it has amounted to for the r-r-rest of us. I shouldn't know a sh-sh-shilling if you should show me one. I d-d-don't believe Rube or S-S-Si ever saw a sh-sh-shilling."

"Don't be saucy, Lemuel," said the warning voice of his mother.

"Better k-k-keep a lookout for the redskins, b-b-boys," said Lem, so calmly that his brothers admired him for his strength and courage more than they had ever done before.

They went to look outs on opposite sides of the

cabin, one commanding the dark line of forest and the other the open valley with its fields of grain.

The thunderclouds which had threatened to rise before sunset had drifted away to the southward, and the moon, nearly at its full, shed a calm light upon the scene.

Si's outlook was in the direction of the cornfield. Objects were revealed with such distinctness that he gave the broad, open space only one sweeping glance before facing about to observe the more interesting occurrences within the cabin. His glance lingered a moment only on a small dwarf or scrub oak standing about midway between the house and field which seemed to be agitated as by a sudden breeze. But a slight wind-gust at that moment swept past the house, so that the boy's suspicions, if he had any, were quickly lulled.

"Things have come to a pretty pass if a man must be dictated to and insulted by his children," exclaimed Mr. Fowler.

To this Lem made no reply.

But he did not retreat from his position, and it was plain from the way in which he compressed his lips that he would not yield if he could help it.

"Come, Lemuel, don't be stubborn," his father added, in a more persuasive voice.

"If you can t-t-trust the pledges of enemies that you know n-n-nothing about, you can give yourself up to 'm. But I c-c-can't do it. I'd rather f-f-fight.

"You're an obstinate young whelp! Get out of the way!"

Mr. Fowler gave way wholly to his savage temper, springing to the door, seizing the oaken brace with both hands striving to wrench it from the grasp of his stalwart son.

The stick was removed from its position, and there was a brief struggle for its possession. The man voluntarily relinquished his hold, however, and made a hurried attempt to unbar the door,

“H-h-hold on, father!” cried Lem, in a tone that caused the other to hesitate. “If you o-o-open that door you must go out of it, and alone. And if you ch-ch-choose to go you must s-s-stay, for I shall l-l-lock it after you.”

Lem looked at his mother as he said this; but she had turned away, perhaps so that he could not see her face. Sue made no sign; and he felt that he was justified in what he was doing.

Mr. Fowler sent a scowling glance toward each of the distressed faces in the room, and then coolly opened the door and went out.

He had scarcely crossed the threshold before Lem fulfilled his word, and the oaken brace was once more placed in position.

“What do you see, S-S-Si?” he asked a minute later.

“That scrub oak is nigher the house than it was when I looked afore, and I believe it’s moving this way,” drawled Si.

Lem and Rube both sprang to the lookout which afforded a sight of the shrub, which seemed to have the power of locomotion.

Si was right, for the scrub oak was certainly much nearer the cabin than it had been when they last observed it.

Without an instant’s hesitation Lem thrust the muzzle of a musket through the loophole, took careful aim at the densest part of the shrub and fired.

Si and Rube both had their eyes fixed upon the scrub oak when Lem fired, and they were rewarded by seeing the tree perform such antics as are very uncommon to its species, even in the most violent of wind-gusts. At first it swayed from side to side as though it would topple over. Then it began moving away from the dwelling in a rapid, zigzag course.

“There are two or three of ’em! Give ’em another shot,” exclaimed Rube.

He handed his own gun to Lem, and he had barely time to return to his lookout when a second shot broke the silence of the summer evening.

The dwarf-oak had made the most of the interval in its retreat, so the second shot was made at a much longer range.

But the result was none the less decisive. The flight of the shrub was stopped and it fell over on its side. At the same time three human figures emerged from behind its foliage and fled swiftly toward the forest.

The Indians—for there was no doubt but the stratagem was a result of Indian ingenuity—ran in separate directions, as divergent as though they never intended to come together again.

Two of them made for different points in the forest, the third ran toward the corn field, and his figure was soon blended with the luxuriant grain.

Whether either of them had been struck by a bullet could only be conjectured, although one of them limped perceptibly in running.

“They meant to get up close to the house before we should see them,” said Rube, who was rapidly reloading the muskets discharged by Lem.

“If we had taken father’s word for it you see where we should have been,” drawled Si. For it was clear from the first that he was well satisfied with the course taken by the elder brother.

“The q-q-question is, what did he want us to surrender for unless it was s-s-safe?”

“That’s so,” said Rube, who was naturally less ready than his brothers to be suspicious of Mr. Fowler. “Of course, he knew what he was talking about, and we may be sorry we didn’t go with him before we get through.”

“There is no good reason why we should expect better treatment at the hands of the Indians than others captured by them. They burn the cabins and murder settlers wherever they go. He might have explained if he had wished us to trust him.”

It was Sue who said this, and there was not a cooler or more calculating mind among them than hers.

"There are a good many things I'd like to have him exp-p-plain," rejoined Lem.

"You might have asked him some questions while you was about it," said Si.

"I thought I would l-l-leave that for somebody else."

"I asked him where he was going the last time he went away."

"What d-d-did he s-say?"

"That he was going on a trading trip."

"A t-t-trading trip," echoed Lem, with incredulous emphasis. "K-k-keep a sharp lookout on all sides, and I will go and m-m-milk the cow," he continued.

He himself first took a careful observation of the clearing for any suspicious manifestation that might escape the less careful vision of his brothers. But the scene was as unmarred in its quiet peacefulness as the same locality is at the present day.

Rube and Si returned to the points of lookout they had before occupied, while Lem resumed work on the opening into the cow-shed.

Another section of log was soon removed, and with a milkpail and lantern—the latter of tin, thickly perforated with small holes through which the feeble light of a candle was sprinkled in tiny dots—Lem crawled through the opening, and for a time was invisible to the other inmates of the cabin.

In the meanwhile, Davey had been put to bed in one of the two rooms on the ground floor of the dwelling. Overhead was a loft where the boys slept, and which could be reached only by means of a ladder.

When Lem returned with the pail of milk the boys had nothing to report from their observations.

Still they could not think of going to bed, for the danger and excitement had made even Rube wide

awake. They took turns at the lookout, talking but little, all their senses on the alert for the sounds they dreaded to hear.

But as the hours passed and no demonstration by the enemy was made, their fears in a measure subsided, and before dawn Si and Rube stretched themselves on the cabin floor and fell asleep.

When they awoke the sun was shining in at one of the small windows, and their mother was getting breakfast. They were on their feet in an instant, and ran to the lookouts.

"The c-c-coast is clear," announced Lem, crawling in from the cowshed.

"I don't believe they will try another attack. They found us too sharp for 'em," said Rube.

"We won't c-c-crow too high y-y-yet. There are some folks as s-s-smart as we are that find it hard to beat a pack of r-r-redskins."

"They may have heard how brave Rube is, and so are afeard to show themselves," drawled Si, who was ever ready to speak of Rube's one weakness.

"More likely they have found out that Si is a crack shot with a musket," was Rube's retort. For Silas was the poorest marksman in the family.

Breakfast time passed and the hour approached midday, and still no hostile demonstration was made.

"We can't w-w-waste any more t-t-time in this way," said Lem at last. He chafed at inaction, for he felt that the time ought to be occupied either in strengthening their means of defence or in laying out a plan of flight to the nearest fortified settlement.

"Do you think they have given up the attack, Lemuel?" his mother asked.

"I think there was only a small p-p-party that gave us the scare last night, and that they have g-g-gone to join others. There were enough of them to have b-b-beaten us if we hadn't been p-p-prepared. They meant to give us a s-s-surprise.

Next time they will come in larger f-f-force—that is, if they come at all. That is the w-w-way I have figured it out.”

“And when will they be likely to return?”

“I didn’t figure so far as that. Maybe t-t-to-night, and maybe not for t-t-two or three days.”

While speaking Lem had removed the brace and unbolted the door. Then he examined and primed a musket—he chose Sue’s, since his own was broken—and then took up the water bucket, which was nearly empty.

“What—what’re you going to do now?” Rube asked.

“I’m going to get some w-w-water—or t-t-try to, at any rate.”

“I’d rather drink milk for one day than to go to the spring till I was sure the Indians were all gone.”

“And give the cow milk to drink, too—that would be Rube’s way,” said Si. And with a rather pompous show of his own indifference to back-woods perils, Silas seized his own gun and continued:

“I’ll go with you, Lem, and lead Molly to the spring. That will be easier than lugging water for her to drink.”

“W-w-wait till next time, Si.”

“You said you thought the Indians were gone?”

“They may have l-l-left one or two behind to w-w-watch.”

“And if you should meet one?” said Rube, admiring his brother’s coolness.

“If he was m-m-most afraid, he’d run; if he stood his ground, like enough I should do the r-r-running.”

“Be careful, Lemuel; remember how much we depend on you,” cautioned Mrs. Fowler with a slight quiver in her voice.

“Yes, mother. I shall come back all right.”

Lem was not quite so free from fear as he had

appeared. He approached the forest with every precaution ; and when he had reached it he literally felt his way every foot of the intervening distance to the spring.

Having reached the latter he bent over it to fill the bucket. In the limpid depths he beheld the reflection of his own manly face ; and, an instant after, saw that of an Indian warrior mirrored beside it.

CHAPTER IV.

STRATEGY THAT FAILED.

Lem had, as he supposed, taken every possible precaution in his approach to the spring against surprise. Therefore, the sight of the copper-colored visage mirrored in the pool beside his own was all the more startling.

Had he in imagination been placed in the predicament in which he now really found himself, he would have been wholly at a loss what to do. But, face to face with his peril, and not even a moment allowed him, he was forced to act under the impulse of self-preservation which seems to have been implanted in the nature of every living creature. And this action was probably better in effect than any that could have been planned beforehand. His bucket was only partly filled. His left hand grasped the pail, while the right held the bottom in the usual position for dipping into the pool. And this circumstances favored the action which, like a flash, he was prompted to execute.

Without releasing his hold on the bucket or giving any sign of having discovered the presence of the foe, Lem sprang suddenly to his feet, and, with a rapid whirl sideways, dashed more than a gallon of cold spring water directly in the face and eyes of the Indian; and then, having snatched his gun from the tree against which it rested, he leaped over the pool, skillfully avoided the large tree trunks and clumps of undergrowth, and quickly left his enemy out of sight. He continued his flight for a short distance only, for the direction taken was necessarily away from the clearing. Reaching a large oak he paused for breath, and for a glance back-

ward to see if he was pursued. For some moments he gazed and listened, but saw nor heard nothing of the redskin. Believing that he had thrown the latter off his track, temporarily at least, he decided to make his way back to the clearing as quickly as possible.

He had proceeded in retracing his steps only a short distance, however, before he was startled by the sound of light, swift footfalls approaching from the right. Glancing in that direction he beheld the Indian from whom he had fled running rapidly toward him.

Lem brought his gun to his shoulder, but before he could fire the Indian began to dance and skip about with such nimbleness and rapidity that the white youth dared not discharge the weapon; for if he did so and missed the mark he would be placed almost at the mercy of his foe.

The savage was an agile fellow, and apparently but a few years older than his pale-faced enemy. In his nimble antics it became speedily evident that he had a double purpose in view. One was to render Lem's aim uncertain, the others to work himself out of the range of the white youth's piece. And in both these objects he was successful. The forest trees were nearly all of considerable size, yet only now and then one had a trunk large enough to fully shelter the body of a man. The Indian, as soon as he saw that the white youth intended to make a standing fight instead of again using his legs, cast his glance about for a tree sufficiently large for his purpose, and having espied one close at hand, he made his way toward it as rapidly as his zigzag mode of locomotion would allow.

Lem perceived the Indian's intention, and yet dared not risk a shot at such an uncertain mark. There were intervening twigs and branches, and the redskin's maneuvers were made with inconceivable rapidity. A bird on the wing would have afforded a more promising target. Therefore he was forced

to seek shelter of the same character else he would soon be left in the same hazardous position as was his enemy at that moment. For the Indian had a gun, and would undoubtedly make use of it as soon as he had a chance to do so.

There was a suitable tree within a few paces of Lem, and at the moment when his foe was making a final leap toward his tree the white youth by a similar maneuver gained the shelter he had chosen. Then followed a short interval marked by no demonstration on the part of either the Indian or his white adversary.

Lem ventured to peep cautiously from behind his shelter, but could see nothing of his foe. The distance separating them was but little more than thirty yards. To make any attempt to watch the movements of the Indian necessarily exposed the person of the white youth to a shot; therefore Lem curbed his curiosity and waited with all the patience he could command.

But of the quality of patience the red man is well known to have a large share. The minutes dragged away, while Lem listened, shifting his feet, occasionally peeped around the trunk of his tree until he was almost ready to end the suspense. Still his enemy gave no sign. The stillness of the forest was actually oppressive.

"The redskin is up to some m-m-mischief, or I'm greatly m-m-mistaken," the youth exclaimed at last, giving audible utterance to the suspicion which had made him more uneasy all the while.

The words had scarcely passed his lips when there came a tremendous cracking and crashing among the boughs overhead, and before Lem could glance upward for the cause the redskin alighted sprawling on the ground within musket length of the youth.

The savage was instantly upon his feet, and, uttering a grunt of chagrin, turned to flee. But Lem's musket was levelled so quickly that the Indian seemed to think his doom was sealed, and

he abruptly faced about, flung up his arms in a despairing attitude and uttered a wailing cry which was so prolonged and dismal that the white youth was tempted to lower his piece and let the savage escape.

Lem's intention at first had been to fire. Had he done so as the foe turned to flee, he would have no compunctions of conscience. But having hesitated, the situation was quite different. The foe was at his mercy, with his tomahawk lodged among the boughs overhead and his gun elsewhere. The fact that he was singing his death-song indicated that he expected no mercy, and had the situation of the twain been reversed it is certain that he would have shown none. But he was a savage, while his adversary had been taught by the gentlest of Christian mothers. Perhaps, under the circumstances, Lem would have been justified in fulfilling the redskin's anticipations ; yet he had not the heart to do it, and at the very moment that the Indian's wailing chant ended the white youth lowered his piece.

The situation was then, if possible, more embarrassing than before. The Indian had renounced his life, and found at the last moment that the foe would not take it. What his emotions were no physiognomist could have told from the expression of his stoical countenance. Possibly he would have been better satisfied if the outcome had been what he expected. He might have felt something like humiliation at having sung his death-song too soon.

Lem was likewise at a loss how to dispose of this piece of humanity for which he unexpectedly found himself responsible.

The cause of the catastrophe was easy to discover. The redskin had climbed a tree while Lem was waiting for a demonstration, and having crawled along the branches from one tree to another until he was almost directly over the white youth, was on the point of throwing his tomahawk down upon the latter. To gain a better position and make sure of

his aim he went too far out on a brittle bough, which suddenly broke, with the result I have shown.

The Indian had no weapon on his person, and Lem felt no fear of an attack then. To let him escape, the youth reasoned, would enable the red man to resort to some strategem in which his race was so fertile. So he decided to compromise the matter by making the enemy a prisoner.

The youth approached the savage, taking a stout leathern thong from his pocket as he did so. The Indian evidently comprehended his purpose although he gave no sign. Lem took every precaution against treachery, grasping his hunting knife firmly and making a rather ferocious flourish in the air with it as a sign that he would show no mercy if his foe made any resistance. The Indian submissively put his arms behind him and allowed his captor to bind them securely. Then Lem picked up his own gun, secured that which his captive had left beside the tree, and gave the sententious order :

“Now m-m-march !”

Their footsteps were directed toward the spring and the clearing beyond.

Lem's absence was so prolonged that the inmates of the cabin grew very uneasy. They listened almost breathlessly for the report of a gun, which they momentarily expected to hear. They all stood in the doorway, their gaze fixed upon the spot where the elder brother had disappeared in the forest.

“He wouldn't stay and make us so uneasy unless something had happened,” said Mrs. Fowler.

“It would take more'n one Injun to lick Lem in a fair fight,” said Rube, confidently. “He could have handled dad as easy as could be last night if he had really set out,” he added, growing enthusiastic over his big brother's prowess.

“Hush, Reuben,” admonished Sue.

An instant later a startled exclamation escaped them all, save Silas, in the same breath. He said

nothing but raised his gun to his shoulder in his deliberate way.

"Shoot quick, Si! Don't be all day taking aim!" Rube excitedly cried.

But after a moment Si lowered his piece.

"It isn't always best to be in too much of a hurry," he drawled.

The others were too much astonished at what they saw to reply. For, from the point where the footpath entered the forest, the form of an Indian warrior emerged and advanced at a measured pace directly toward the cabin. Si had just taken aim at the redskin when the familiar figure of Lem Fowler appeared in his rear.

What was most mysterious to those watching from the cabin door was the fact that the savage carried one hand stiffly at his side, while in the other he bore a bucket of water; and Lem, walking in his footsteps, carried a gun over each shoulder.

"It is Winawis, the Nipmuck!" exclaimed Rube, in a tone of delight.

"What ails your eyes, Rube?" returned Si. "Winawis wears a hunting shirt and breeches, while that fellow is pretty nigh naked. And don't you see?—one of his arms is bound. That's why he carries it so stiff."

"And he has war paint on," added Sue, who was as keen of vision as an old backwoodsman.

While they were discussing the subject, Lem and his captive appeared.

"Come and t-t-take the b-b-bucket, sir," said Lem, bringing his prisoner to a halt.

The Indian stood as motionless as a statue as Si relieved him of his burden, and his eyes, black and shiny as beads, seemed to take not the least notice of his captor or anything else. His face was as devoid of expression as that of a wooden image.

"Is he friendly, Lemuel?" Mrs. Fowler questioned.

"Yes, if he c-c-cant help himself. He tried to kill

me with his tomahawk and m-m-met with an accident."

And Lem told the story of his encounter in the forest.

"I know why he didn't t-t-try to sh-sh-shoot me," the youth continued. "When I threw the w-w-w-ater on him some of it wet his m-m-musket. It has got to b-b-be cleaned out and rubbed d-d-dry afore it'll w-w-work. Water helped me out of that scrape better than p-p-powder could. He didn't expect it, and he got a good d-d-dousing."

"Why didn't you shoot him when you had a chance?" asked Rube.

"Because I waited till my b-b-blood cooled down, and then it seemed too much like m-m-murder."

"You did right to spare him, Lemuel," was Mrs. Fowler's prompt verdict.

"So you made him fetch the bucket of water for you?" said Rube, who had planted himself directly in front of the prisoner, and was eyeing him with undisguised curiosity.

"I thought it was no more than fair, as I had to carry his g-g-gun."

"The question is now, what are you going to do with him?" Sue suggested.

"Keep him and feed him, and maybe he'll get friendly to us after a while, same as the young bear did that Si caught in the trap last fall," said Rube.

"He isn't the kind of a c-c-cub that tames easy. He don't look as if you could ever f-f-fetch him around to be much of a p-p-pet," laughed Lem.

"Better give him to Rube; he's a great feller to make pets," drawled Si, who had set to work to put the Indian's musket in condition for use.

"You oughter have disarmed him and let him go," said Mrs. Fowler, to whom the novelty of a hostage from the enemy was not great enough to disguise the accompanying dilemma.

"That is what I thought of doing," Lem replied. "But then I thought there might be other Indians

near, and that he would manage to signal to them and get them after me in time, perhaps, to c-c-cut me off before I got to the cabin. So I f-f-fetched him along. If you say l-l-let him go, then g-g-go it is."

"If we keep him we can make him fetch all the water," was the characteristic suggestion of Rube.

"He might fetch in the wood and chop it for Rube after he gets him tamed," said Si.

The object of all this discussion in the meanwhile had not stirred from the spot where he had been halted. His bead-like eyes wandered from one to another member of the little group about the doorway, but whether he understood what they were saying or not was an enigma.

"Fetch him into the house, Lemuel, and keep a sharp watch on him while I get him somethin' to eat," said Mrs. Fowler, after a moment's consideration.

"And then l-l-let him go. Is that the plan, mother?"

"Just as you think about it. Probably kindness will have no effect upon him, but it can't make him any worse. I don't see how we can keep him here. Somebody would have to guard him all the time, and we shouldn't feel safe even then."

Lem spoke to the Indian and made a sign for him to enter the cabin. They all went in, and their unwilling guest was seated at the table, with one hand still bound at his side. Mrs. Fowler and Sue brought out food and set before him, and with a grunt, which might have expressed satisfaction or displeasure equally well, the savage fell to eating at a rate that showed his appetite to be unaffected by captivity.

A knife and plate were put on for him to use, but greatly to the amusement of the boys he pushed these implements of civilization aside, and grabbing first a biscuit and then a piece of meat, stuffed them into his mouth at a most astonishing rate.

Several biscuits and slices of meat shared the same fate. Then he gulped down a tin cupful of water, after which he uttered another grunt, which was no less and no more expressive than the first.

"Now, do send him off," exclaimed Mrs. Fowler.

Lem made a sign, and the Indian followed him out to the door. There the youth cut the thong confining the captive's other arm and pointed towards the forest.

"You may g-g-go," said Lem.

The savage started, for the first time evincing surprise. Then he grunted once more with some emphasis, and started at a loping trot toward the forest.

He did not make for the spot where he had encountered Lem, however, but took an almost opposite direction. Re-entering the cabin the boys watched him from a lookout.

"He has stopped and is making some signs," Si exclaimed, after a moment.

The redskin was bending over the ground, with his face toward the cabin, and gesticulating in a rapid and, to the beholders, an incomprehensible manner. Then he wheeled suddenly and ran with the speed of the wind toward the forest.

"I'd like to know what he m-m-means by those antics," said Lem.

"It may be his way of thanking us for his dinner," was Rube's suggestion.

At that moment Sue came from the smaller room which, as I have said, was partitioned from the only other room the cabin contained. Her usually calm, pretty face was pale with alarm.

"Have you seen him? Davey, I mean," she cried.

"Davey? Isn't he there?" And Mrs. Fowler darted through the doorway, while the boys began looking here and there, and questioning Sue at the same time.

"I left him asleep on my bed only a few minutes before we went out to look for Lem," she explained.

"L-l-look up in the l-l-loft, Si," said Lemuel. But Rube reached the ladder first, and scrambled into the loft, while Lem sprang through the opening which he had made into the cowshed.

Si, in his deliberate way, went out of doors.

"Perhaps that redskin's queer antics meant something," was the suggestion of his slower brain.

Whether they did or not will be explained in another chapter.

Davey was about six years old, with bright blue eyes, a curly pate and a little brain which was busy all the time hatching mischief or thinking up bright things to say.

Because Sister Sue left him apparently sound asleep on her bed was no guarantee that she would find him in that condition when she should return.

The door had scarcely closed after her, in truth, before his round eyes were staring up at the hewn beams overhead. And as that quickly proved to be dull business, he crawled off the bed and crept to the door. Opening the latter just a crack he peeped warily out, and saw that the room was vacant. He could hear Si's drawl and Rube's brisk voice out of doors, and realizing that for the moment the coast was clear, he was soon in the kitchen, and, clambering upon a stool, reached for a cup of milk on a shelf.

The milk was soon disposed of, partly on the outside of his person, of course, and he then espied the opening into the cowshed made by Lem.

This was something he had not yet explored, and he lost no time in making up for the deficiency. He crawled feet foremost through the opening and dropped to the ground beyond. The shed had no window, and only a few rifts of sunshine came in through crevices between the logs, and it was therefore a minute or two before he could discern the bulky form of the cow. And at the same moment he discovered something else which would have frightened him had the object not have spoken in a very mild, reassuring voice.

"I won't hurt you, Davey," said the voice, which somehow had a slightly familiar sound to the child's ears.

"Be you an Injun?" Davey asked, backing towards the opening.

"No, Davey, I'm a very good white man," was the reply. And the form advanced and gently drew Davey away from the egress.

The good white man, as the stranger called himself, was very tall, a little stoop-shouldered and possessed a very large nose. So much Davey took in at a glance and he was further reassured by the fact that the man's lips were drawn away from his teeth in what the child thought a tremendous smile of good nature, but which might have indicated a different emotion to a less credulous observer.

"I dess I'll go tell ma you've tum," said Davey, with another movement toward the opening.

"In jest a minute, my smart little man," was the flattering response. And the good white man took one of Davey's hands in his, and leading him to the shed door, pushed it open, in a sly sort of way.

"Now, I'm going to tell you something, if you'll promise to be real quiet about it," said the stranger.

"I won't tell anybody, 'cept ma," was the ready response.

"That is right, my little man. But we want to surprise your ma a little bit, don't we? Now who do you suppose is out here waiting to see you?"

Davey's curiosity was excited. He would have darted out had he not been held back by that strong but not ungentle hand.

"Who is it? Is it Nipmut?"

"Nipmut" was Davey's version of Nipmuck, the tribe to which Winawis, the friendly Indian, belonged, and he never called his red friend anything else.

"No. It is your pa! And he wants to see his little boy," said the good white man.

He pushed the door open wide as he spoke, and led Davey out. The child glanced around, expecting

to see his father, but in that he was disappointed. "I tan't see pa. I dess he gone round to other side of the house were ma is. I dess we better."

"Your pa is out this way, just a few steps. He has caught a rabbit for you, all alive, and is fixing a cage for him. Let us hurry and see him!"

The good white man hurried the child over the ground toward the cornfield, keeping the house between them and the members of the Fowler household, who were looking for Lem on the opposite side of the cabin. It was at that moment that Lem and his captive emerged from the forest, so there was little danger of the good white man's action being detected by them.

"Where is pa?" cried Davey, anxiously, as he found that he was being forced to run faster than his short legs were fitted for carrying him.

"Just out here a bit further, my little man, fixing the cage for the squirrel—"

"You said it vos a rabbit!" Davey quickly interposed.

"So I did, and it is a rabbit. I always say squirrel when I mean rabbit—isn't that queer?" And looking up into the face of his captor Davey saw that the good-natured smile had broadened until it did not seem so pleasant as at first.

"I dess I stop here, and you do and tell pa to tum, and I'll wait," said Davey, coming resolutely to a standstill.

The good white man glanced back toward the cabin, and then at the field of waving corn. Then he suddenly bent his tall figure, and his long arms caught the child up to his breast, so quickly and with so much force as to smother the outcry which Davey tried to make. A few swift strides brought him to the field of corn. A few more carried him out of sight of the cabin. And there he came to a halt, and placed his captive upon the ground.

Davey was too much terrified then to scream. The good white man still seemed to be smiling, only the smile had grown dreadful to the child. All the good

nature had gone out of it. Yet he had genuine backwoods material in him, and pluckily restrained the sob of terror that rose in his breast.

"Where is my pa?" he exclaimed. "I dess you ain't a dood white man. I don't b'lieve my pa has dot me any rabbit."

"Yes, he has, and he is right out here a little ways further," said his captor. And he tried to lead the boy deeper into the cornfield.

But Davey hung back with all his strength and uttered a sharp scream of mingled anger and terror, which would have been heard at the cabin had the wind not blown so as to carry the sound away from instead of toward the dwelling.

The good white man again raised the child in his arms. He had a heavy musket in one hand, and evidently found a double burden cumbersome. He began to penetrate further into the sheltering field of grain, but advanced only a few paces before he saw something to bring him again to a halt. A man was running toward them along an aisle between rows of corn. The man was Josiah Fowler, and he exclaimed in a quick, hoarse voice:

"Run to your right, Silas, quick! That Nipmuck-Winawis heard the boy's scream. I'll cover your flight."

Davey heard the words, but did not recognize the voice. His captor held him so that he could not get a glimpse of his father, and wheeling abruptly ran swiftly in a direction at right angles with his former course. Almost at the same moment the figure of a lithe Indian warrior sprang into view, and pausing, glanced keenly about him.

Davey saw the young Indian and cried joyfully:

"Nipmut! Nipmut!"

Winawis heard the cry, perceived the child and his captor, and with the grace and fleetness of a young deer bounded in pursuit.

As he sped past the spot where Davey's father stood, this strange man raised his gun and took hasty aim at the friendly Nipmuck.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL.

Deliberate as the action of Mr. Fowler seemed to be, he was really far from being cool. The young Indian was running rapidly, but the range was so short that an ordinary marksman ought not to have missed. Yet Fowler's gun was discharged without bringing Winawis to a halt.

The young Nipmuck heard the report of the piece; he might even have heard the bullet as it whistled past his face and clipped through the corn. Yet he did not halt for an instant, or even turn his face to see whence the shot proceeded. It was enough for him that he had an enemy before him, and another in his rear, and that if he paused to face the latter he would lose sight of the one, and at the same time the chance of rescuing the child, whose cries had aroused his chivalry.

Davey's captor, aware of the pursuit, darted hither and thither amid the sheltering rows of corn, and thus rendered the attempts of the Indian more difficult than he could have done merely by a display of superior fleetness.

The young Indian anticipated some strategy of this character, and so did not waste his powers in mere speed, which would avail nothing. After passing from the view of Fowler, he slackened his pace to a brisk walk, with his lithe body bent forward, and his gaze roving rapidly from side to side, and penetrating the shadowy aisles of corn. Several times he paused to listen, and once he was sure he heard the sound of retreating footsteps. Still, persistent and patient though he was, considerable time elapsed without any encouraging results. At

last, however, he came suddenly to a halt, unslung the long bow from his back and deftly fitted an arrow to the string. Nothing could have been more quickly or silently done. It was no wonder that such an expert with that silent and supple weapon clung to its use even in the face of its manifest inferiority in most cases to the white man's musket. Winawis drew the arrow half-way to the head, and held it poised there, without a quiver of muscle, for a full minute. Then he as quickly loosed the string, and, with bow and arrow held in his left hand, advanced with his right extended.

"My young white brother!" he exclaimed, a faint smile of pleasure lighting his dark face.

"Lucky for you I got a glimpse of your face just as I did, for I had a bead drawn on you that I shouldn't have missed," said Silas Fowler, his usual drawl marked by a slight tremor. His hand, clasped for an instant in that of the Indian, trembled also.

"The arrow would have beaten the bullet," was the Indian's reply, which Si could not dispute, since the bent bow and muscular arm of Winawis was the first sign of the latter's presence presented to the white youth's vision.

"You are just the one I was wishing I might meet," said Si. Winawis looked steadily into his face, but did not speak. He seemed to be listening. Silas continued: "You know, of course, that there are unfriendly Indians about? The woods are full of them, and I expect they have carried off Davey. We are looking for him high and low, and I think I found the trail of the the one that carried him off, but I lost it again. You're such a famous hand to follow a trail that Lem said you could help us more in hunting for him than a whole company of white soldiers."

"How long has our little brother been missing?" asked the young Indian, in English which was more perfect and sounding more musical than from the lips of the white youth.

"Only an hour or two. He was taken from the shed by our cabin, and we don't know just how long it was before we found it out."

"And you are sure that it was an unfriendly red man who carried him away?" pursued Winawis, still seeming to be listening.

"Of course it was. They tried to attack the cabin, and Lem has had a fight with two of them."

The Indian bent and pointed with an arrow at several footprints in the soft earth at their feet.

"Those are tracks of a white man, and he carried a burden. See how uneven he was running, and how he turned from side to side."

While he spoke thus Winawis rapidly walked along the trail he had pointed out, and by stepping in the tracks themselves, gave a vivid illustration of the zigzag flight of Davy's captor. Then, without pausing, he beckoned for Silas to follow, and, with rapid, noiseless steps, advanced along the trail, though he no longer attempted to step in the exact footprints he was following.

Si kept close behind his red friend, a new confidence in the latter's powers being awakened. They kept on thus for several minutes, and still they did not emerge from the cornfield.

"We're going in a circle," he exclaimed at last. Winawis made no reply, and Si added, in a breathless drawl:

"My legs ache. There are a lot of tracks along here, and they're so mixed up. I don't see how you can make head or tail of 'em."

The young Indian kept on for another full minute, and then abruptly halted with the guttural "Ugh!" of his race.

They were near the edge of the field, and glimpses of the adjacent forest could be obtained from where they stood.

Winawis pointed to the yellow loam between the rows of corn. "Look!" he exclaimed, with an eagerness that Silas did not understand until a mo-

ment later. For at first he saw only the tracks which they had been following and which he had by this time become sufficiently familiar with to recognize. The young Indian pointed at these first, at a point where the fugitive had evidently halted. Then he indicated others, which appeared to have come from a different direction and had likewise halted. And between these two, where the persons seemed to have paused for hasty consultation, was a pair of small footprints—the footprints of a bare-foot child.

“Davey’s tracks, sure,” Si exclaimed, excitedly.

“Hush,” cautioned his companion.

“Now we’re sure we’re on the right trail. Follow it fast as you can, and for once I’ll try and be swift,” said the white youth, thrilled by the hope of soon overtaking the captor of Davey, and taking a hand in the rescue.

“My pale brother shows that he looks without seeing,” said Winawis, bending closely over the footprints.

“Why? What is wrong now?”

“When there was only one trail we knew how to follow it. Now there are two, and they both lead into the forest. Our little brother was put down here and taken up again. We see no more of his tracks, and how do we know which carried him away. Did the one that brought him here give him to the other? Can my brother tell which trail to follow?”

Si could only look helplessly at the dark face of his companion. He began to realize that he would have made a very poor scout had he attempted to follow the trails unaided.

His reflections were interrupted by the Indian, who quickly drew him back from the edge of the field. At the same time Winawis dropped to a crouching posture, an action which even Si was not slow in imitating, for he heard rapidly approaching footsteps from the direction of the woods. An instant later two figures emerged from the forest

shadows and stood motionless, in a listening attitude, facing the cornfield.

One was an Indian in war paint; the other Si Fowler recognized with a thrill of dismay as his father. Only the restraining hand of Winawis withheld the white youth from springing to his feet.

It will be understood that Si Fowler had no suspicion that his father was concerned in the abduction of Davey.

Though a very eccentric man, Mr. Fowler always manifested considerable affection for his youngest boy. Therefore it would have been all the more absurd to suspect him of having a hand in anything that might injure the child. However thoughtless or unkind he might be toward other members of his family, Si thought, Mr. Fowler would do at least all in his power to protect helpless little Davey.

But the hand of Winawis was sufficient to restrain him from exposing their nearness to his father. The presence of the hostile Indian served as a further check; and in his slow way Si made up his mind to leave the direction of affairs, for the present, to the sagacious Nipmuck.

The white and red youths held their breaths as they waited to see what Mr. Fowler and his companion would do next. The white man was speaking in a low, rapid tone, and in the French language, which it was evident the Indian understood. Neither Si nor Winawis could interpret a word. It was the first intimation Silas had that his eccentric father understood any language beside his own.

That they were in danger of discovery the young Indian was aware, for it was only by a lucky chance that the gaze of the two men was not directed toward them. The slightest movement on the part of either would surely betray their presence. But they were soon relieved of that phase of suspense. Mr. Fowler and his red companion turned and retreated into the forest, separating as they entered its shadows.

"Well, that beats anything," exclaimed Si, rising to his feet. "My young brother had better return to his home," said Winawis in a hurried tone.

"And leave Davey to be carried off by the varmints? I told Lem and mam that I was going to find you, and that we'd fetch Davey back safe and sound, and I'm not going to back out. Another thing I'm going to find out, and that is what father means by his queer capers. What business has he with that painted scamp? Did you know what they were saying?"

"Winawis could not understand the words of their lips, but he read the language of their faces and hands. Go back to the cabin, where your rifle may be needed. Hurry, there is no time to lose! Our little brother shall be found and brought back. But it will take a fleet foot and keen eyes to follow the trail. Tell the pale mother and brave sister to trust their red friend. He will bring back Davey before another sun has come and gone."

There was something of command in the young Indian's speech, and he did not wait for the slow-brained Si to remonstrate. Before the latter could utter a word the Nipmunk sprang boldly out of the cornfield and plunged into the forest.

Si hesitated, then started to follow, with the dogged persistency of his nature. But before he had gone twenty yards better judgment prevailed, and he turned to retrace his steps.

As he did so he was startled by the sound of rapid footsteps, and they were coming so directly toward him that he had no time for flight. He was on the very edge of the forest, and he naturally chose the nearest large tree for shelter, an act wise enough in itself, but culminating in the present instance in a peculiar and unforeseen danger.

The tree, for a space of six or seven feet from the ground, was partially hollow, and for effectual protection Si squeezed himself into the cavity. At the same time he heard the footsteps which had caused

his alarm pause close to the same tree, upon the opposite side, while a shadowy figure likewise appeared in front of him and only a few yards distant. The youth realized that he was literally "between two fires"—someone, whether friend or foe to himself he did not yet know, having chosen the same tree as himself as shelter from another person in front of him.

Si had never been in what could be called a tight pinch before. Yet, as a backwoods boy, he was trained to expect danger, and he was by nature as calm and deliberate as a clock.

"If they're enemies to each other it follows that one or t'other may be a friend to me," he reflected.

He let his gun rest in the tree by his side and grasped the cumbersome pistol which he carried in his belt. This weapon, placed beside the revolvers of the present day, would make my readers smile at the comparison. But Si would not have parted with it at that moment for hardly anything in the world.

He was not long kept in suspense as to the person he saw flitting from tree to tree. The figure was that of an Indian, and as agile of movement as a cat. It reached a tree scarce a dozen yards from Silas, and from behind that shelter reached out a bare, muscular arm in a peculiar gesture that the white youth recognized and understood. The arm belonged to Winawis; the gesture meant, "Stay where you are!" And all the while Si could hear his foe's deep breathing on the other side of the tree, and realized that only the shell of the decayed trunk separated them.

The young Nipmuck understood the peril of Si's position better than did Si himself. He realized the danger of every moment's delay, and did not hesitate to increase his own hazard to bring affairs to a crisis. Without waiting for the foe to begin tactics, he boldly exposed his own person to the enemy's fire, although he kept dodging from side to side,

half behind his tree, that he by no means afforded a sure mark. A moment later he ran swiftly to another tree, at the same time beginning to gesticulate as though beckoning to a friend somewhere beyond his adversary.

This stratagem, coupled with his boldness, resulted just as he intended. The hostile Indian thought his own concealment to be unsafe, and tried to dart across an open space to another tree.

Si could not see all these maneuvers without exposing his own person, but he heard the rapid footsteps of the foe, and almost simultaneously a twang, a whiz, and a short, sharp cry that sent a strange sensation to his heart. Then he saw Winawis running toward him, shouting and gesticulating, and his own peril shut out whatever unpleasant feelings the tragedy which had been enacted so near him might have caused.

"Run, run for the cornfield, and home," cried the young Indian.

Si started to obey, and at the same time heard shouts from the rear, from the right and the left. They were responses from the stricken enemy's comrades. It seemed to Si that his legs were changed into logs of wood, they were so heavy.

"Run—home," urged the young Nipmuck, and the white youth never tried so hard to overcome his natural slowness. He would have preferred to pause and openly fight his pursuers, but the voice of his red friend urged him on. He reached the open space betwixt the forest and cornfield, crossed it, and was on the point of entering the latter when he heard a heavy tread behind.

"Stop, Silas! come back!" exclaimed a stern voice, which he recognized. More from the habit of obedience to that voice than to anything else he paused and faced about.

"I don't know why I need to run from you," he exclaimed in his slowest drawl, for he was face to face with his father.

Silas had reached the edge of the cornfield, and penetrated it far enough to be concealed from his other enemies who might be on the lookout from the forest. Winawis was no longer in sight, and Si and his father were practically alone.

"There's no need of your running from me, that's a fact," said Mr. Fowler, advancing until he was within an arm's length of the youth.

"No more than there was for you to chase me the way you were doing. About as broad as it is long, father," Silas returned.

"If you keep with me you won't have any trouble. Did you come out to look for me? Are your mother and the rest with you?"

"I left them at the house, and came out to look for Davey. I expect the redskins have got hold of him somehow."

"That comes of your mother's and Lemuel's disobeying me. I told you all what to do, and if you had minded——"

"We might all of us be in the same fix that Davey is!" Si interrupted, as the strange behavior of his father slowly crowded on his memory. He had halted in obedience to his father's command from an impulse, and now he was glad he had done so, for he was resolved to know the truth of Mr. Fowler's relations with the French and Indian enemies of the white settlers.

"Do you think I would get my own family into danger?" Mr. Fowler demanded.

"I don't know what to think. I saw you with a redskin a little while ago, and you were talking in some lingo that I couldn't understand. The Indian was in war paint, and as ugly looking a critter as you could find. What does that mean?"

Fowler looked surprised, but hastened to reply:

"It means that I have power to protect myself and my family if they only trusted me."

"You wanted us to surrender."

"Because it was for your safety. I can't help you any if you hold out and make a fight."

Si's brain, like his legs, was rather slow to act. But as he thought of the settlers' cabins which had been burned, and the stories of Indian cruelty which he had heard and knew to be true, it occurred to him that there must be something wrong about a white man who was friendly with these French and Indian allies. There was something questionable even in obtaining protection at their hands. It was a hard conclusion to reach, but Si began to think that, in some mysterious way, his father was in league with the enemies of the colonists. The youth's recent peril had made him quite pale. But now a determined flush crept slowly into his cheeks.

"You want us to surrender to those red and white varmints!" he exclaimed in his slow way.

"Why not, if they promise not to harm you?"

"Who have they made that promise to?"

"To me."

"Do they make the same offer to other settlers?"

"That isn't our business. If they have taken a fancy to us, then it is our good luck, and we must make the most of it."

Si looked steadily at his father while they were speaking, and now he began slowly to walk backward.

"Hold on! What are you going to do?" the other exclaimed.

"I'm going home to tell the folks what you say," was the drawling reply.

"And you will all come out and join me, and be taken to a safer place?"

"If they want to after I tell 'em about you they may. But I'll stay and fight it out alone afore I will go with you! I'll run off and join the white scouts in the valley, and help 'em to defend the settlers from the redskins that you think more of than of us!"

Fowler advanced, his face ablaze with anger. Si started to run, but glancing back and seeing his

father in the act of leveling his gun, he halted again, his heart seeming to turn to a lump of lead.

"Shoot me if you want to!" he cried, in a choked voice. "I might shoot, too, but I had rather be killed than do that!"

For a moment the twain stood thus, the man's eyes flashing along the barrel of his weapon, the boy erect and motionless, with pale cheeks and quivering lips. Then the weapon was lowered, and as though fearful lest the impulse might forsake him, the strange father turned and ran toward the forest. He disappeared without having once looked backward. In the meanwhile the indications of the presence of other foes had continued. There was a report of a firearm, and loud, signalling whoops, all indicating that the brave young Nipmuck was doing all in his power to divert the attention of the foe from the white youth. "He would lose his life in my defense!" Si exclaimed, thrilling with gratitude toward his red friend.

"It isn't color that makes the savage, after all," he continued, as he walked rapidly toward the cabin. He reached the edge of the cornfield, and before leaving its shelter took a careful survey of the clearing.

So far as the eye could discern all was secure about the cabin. There had been no attack made in his absence, and as the day was drawing toward a close there was little danger of one till some time after nightfall.

But now there was the certainty of numerous foes in the vicinity, Silas dreaded the coming of night. That a great struggle would come then he felt sure. About Davey he did not worry so much, for he began to believe the sagacious young Nipmuck was able to perform any wonder of bravery or strategy, and that he would save the child from his captors, as he had promised.

Striking into a trot Si soon reached the cabin.

Lem opened the door for him, and before closing it asked :

“What n-n-news, Si?”

“I have seen Winawis and he was on the trail when I met him. If anybody can save Davey that Indian can, and he has promised to do it.”

In answer to their questioning he gave, in his drawling tones, a partial account of his adventures. But he made no mention of the encounter with his father, nor of seeing the latter with the hostile Indian.

It was not until an hour later that he had a chance to say to Lem, in a low tone which the others could not overhear :

“I shall bust if I don’t tell you the rest of my adventures.”

“I thought you was k-k-keeping something back,” said Lem.

“I saw father. He is with the French and Indians, and talks their lingo with ’em, and I believe he is a traitor to the backbone!”

“Things have looked d-d-dark a good while, and that is why I s-s-stood out against him last night,” was the gravely spoken response.

“You don’t think he’ll let the varmints serve us as they do other settlers, do you?” Si exclaimed.

“Not if he can help it. That is why he is so anxious for us to surrender.”

“If we hold out what can he do?”

“Maybe he can save us if we’re taken prisoners. But if there is a f-f-fight he can’t help what h-h-happens in that.”

Si detailed his encounter with Mr. Fowler in the cornfield, and repeated his own answer to the man’s proposition.

“Did I do right or wrong, Lem?” he asked, a tremor in his tones.

“You did b-b-bravely, Si.”

“And what will marm say? and Sue?”

“That we won’t turn traitors because d-d-dad has,”

“Lem ! Si ! quick !” cried Rube at that instant from the front of the cabin, where he had been making an observation.

They did not need to be called to the lookout, for the sounds of rapid firing and terrifying yells in that direction apprised them that a startling demonstration was being made.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER.

Not only the older boys responded to Rube's call, but Mrs. Fowler and Sue also, the latter gun in hand.

Neither mother or daughter had shed any tears over the capture of Davey. The oppressive weight of the great danger compassing them all; the call for resolute action and unwavering coolness; the strange desertion, in their need, of the one to whom they should have looked for protection—all roused in them a sort of masculine fortitude that tears could not express or relieve.

"We are all in God's hands, and he can help Davey as easy as he can the rest of us!" was the pious thought that the mother uttered and the daughter echoed, when they became assured that Davey was really in the hands of the enemy.

What Rube saw through the loophole was this: The small clearing, with the rosy hue of sunset upon it, the black-green forest beyond and ruddy clouds above, just as they appeared upon any pleasant evening of that most golden of summer months. Upon the edge of the forest, where the darkness of night fell while it was yet day in the opening, Rube saw the flash of guns—three or four of them—fired in quick succession; and nearer, half-way across the clearing, was the object of the shots, running, leaping, falling and springing up again, with such rapidity that the watchers could scarce follow its movements.

In the twilight that was settling over the scene it was hard to tell whether the fugitive were red or white, male or female. That "it" was making for

the Fowler cabin was plain enough ; and likewise that no serious injury had been done by the shots of the foe.

"We must let the poor critter in quick as he gits to the door," exclaimed Mrs. Fowler, her heart quick to respond to the need of the stranger.

"Take away the brace, Si, but d-d-don't o-open the door till I s-s-say the word," said Lem.

The brace was removed, while those at the lookout saw several dusky forms flitting to and fro along the edge of the forest.

"G-g-give 'em a shot, Rube!" was Lem's next suggestion. At the same moment the Indians began firing again, and the thud, thud of bullets in the logs of the cabin could be distinctly heard.

Rube's gun "spoke" through the loophole, and told the Indians that the cabin home was not without defenders. Its report was encouraging to the approaching fugitive also, and served to give him renewed courage. He stood more erect, and ran more directly toward the cabin door. He did not have to pause even when he reached it, for Si opened it wide, and the stranger staggered across the threshold and fell full length on the floor, where he lay panting and apparently too exhausted to stir or speak.

"Keep a sharp lookout, b-b-boys," Lem admonished. He bent over the stranger and peered into his face, and then spoke to him encouragingly.

"You're safe now, mister," he said. "You had a pretty close r-rub, though, and the redskins must have been poor shots to have m-missed you. Was you struck anywhere? Here, S-S-Sue, fetch some whiskey, afore the man f-f-faints clean away!"

Some liquor was poured in a tin cup and Sue held it to the man's lips while Lem held him up. It was surprising to see how readily the whiskey was gulped down, considering the exhausted state of the fugitive.

"Does that b-b-brace you up any?" Lem asked as

the man cast a wistful glance after the empty cup as Sue carried it away.

"A very little," was the faint response, and the fugitive leaned with great weight against Lem's arms.

"He wants more whiskey," suggested Rube.

"Better give him c-c-catnip tea next time. Too m-m-much whiskey might hurt him when he's so weak," said Lem, who began to suspect that the man would not get any stronger as long as there was a prospect of being dosed with an agreeable medicine. That this theory was not without foundation was indicated by the man opening his eyes and rising to a sitting posture. Seeing that Sue had taken Lem's suggestion of catnip in good faith, the stranger quickly said :

"Never mind about that, miss. I couldn't abide the yarb, no how—it allus went agin me. I'm pretty weak, though—hard runnin' and loss of blood."

"Then you were h-h-hit?" Lem exclaimed.

"Nothin' serious—tied it up with my hankercher—ye needn't take the trouble to look at it, bein's the wimmen-folks might be squeamish at seein' the blood. Right there' in the calf of my leg."

Lem noticed then for the first time that the man had a bandage around his right leg, a little below the knee. He would have examined it, but the man hastily drew up the limb, saying :

"Don't tech it—please don't! I'd ruther wait till I feel a bit stronger."

"Better have it seen to before inflammation g-g-gets in," Lem persisted.

"No, no, I tell ye! I'd ruther wait "

The fugitive rose to his feet and sat down on the settee. He was a short man, of muscular frame and not over-intelligent features. It was too dark in the room to make out more than this, but Lem had observed him too closely to be favorably impressed.

"Did the Indians make you a p-prisoner?" Lem asked, sitting on the other end of the settee and eyeing their guest sideways.

"They tried to, but didn't make out. But they've done enough ter me. They've burnt down my cabin and kerried off my dear wife and little un! Like enough they've tomahawked 'em afore this." There was a pitiful whine in the man's tones that aroused the sympathy of Mrs. Fowler and Sue.

"They're a cruel lot, and I hope the s-s-settlers and scouts may g-g-get together and drive 'em off," said Lem, who somehow found it hard to express great sympathy for their guest. The latter impressed the youth as being selfish, and somewhat of a coward. Still he did not wish to show the stranger injustice.

The man relapsed into silence and Lem roused him by another question.

"When was your house b-b-burned?"

"Last night—'bout midnight, should say," was the answer.

"What have you b-b-been doing since?"

"Dodgin' redskins, mostly. I tried to follow them that hurried off my dear uns"—with another whine—"but it was no use. That's how I came to get shot a-tryin' to save my dear uns!"

"I can't abide that m-m-man's whine," said Lem to Si, half an hour later.

"About as musical as his snoring, though," Si drawled, as a puffing, then a hoarse nasal sound came from their guest, who had thrown himself down on the floor and almost immediately fallen asleep.

The stranger speedily showed them what he was capable of doing in that most peculiar line. Louder and louder became his respirations, and the strangest and most indescribable sounds were emitted from nostrils and half-open mouth. Rube and Si laughed, and the former suggested that they pinch the sleeper's nose and put a stop to the uproar.

"W-w-wait," said Lem. He approached the slumbering stranger, bent over him for a moment to see that he was not shamming, and then proceeded cautiously to remove the bandage from his leg. It was but a momemt's work. The stocking was whole, and Lem boldly drew it down until the bandaged portion of the limb was bared.

"Just as I suspected b-b-boys," Lem exclaimed, rising to his feet and standing over the sleeper. "His leg is as sound as mine is. He is a h-h-humbug!"

Lem took no pains to utter the announcement of his discovery in a cautious tone, nor did he restore the stocking or bandage to their places. Still the sleeper was not disturbed.

"I should never have thought of such a thing," exclaimed Sue.

"He didn't s-s-seem quite genuine to me from the first," Lem replied.

"Maybe he's a traitor!" was the startling suggestion of Rube.

"Or he may be only a coward," drawled Si, who was not given to conjuring startling things when milder explanations would answer the purpose.

"He had better not t-t-try to humbug us, in any case," stammered the dignified Lem, in his determined way. Sue had lighted a candle, which was placed in the corner of the room where it would shed only a faint light upon window and loopholes, for it was unsafe to give the watchful foe too great a temptation to test their skill with the rifle.

Lem was impatient to demand an explanation of the stranger.

"We did as we'd like to be d-d-done by, and took him in when it looked as if his life d-d-depended on us, and if he isn't square then he must g-g-go, and that in a h-h-hurry."

"Be careful, Lemuel," cautioned Mrs. Fowler.

"Would you h-h-harbor him if he means treachery?"

"No. But remember that we've got more to fight agin' us than we have to fight for us, and it's better to make a friend than another enemy."

"You're right, mother. But if he means m-m-mischief we can't show him too soon that he has got into the wrong b-b-box."

"Let me pinch his nose, Lem," said Rube.

"He'd be for pinching Rube's neck before the fun was over," Si put in.

Lem returned to the slumbering stranger, and, seizing his shoulder, gave him a good shake. The man sat bolt upright in an instant, and the first object that caught his eye was the bandage which Lem had stripped from the supposed wound.

"Eh!" he ejaculated, as his gaze went from the handkerchief to the bared leg.

"We have a way of healing such m-m-matters when a m-m-man is asleep," said Lem dryly.

"I declare for't!" The stranger hastily covered the bared limb, pocketed the bandage and rose to his feet with a crestfallen air.

"W-w-we should have used you just as well if you hadn't told us any l-l-lies," Lem continued.

"I didn't mean nothin', I declare for't," asseverated the man with great earnestness.

"We like folks that mean s-s-something. How about the rest of your s-s-story? What did you come here f-f-for?"

"For protection, true as I live! I didn't lie about my cabin bein' burnt, and my dear uns—"

"S-s-stop whining or I'll put you out and let you s-s-shift for yourself!" Lem interrupted, so sternly that the stranger relapsed into silence, while the sullen gleam came into his eyes. Lem took a pistol, slowly cocked it and handed it to Si, saying:

"I'm going to s s-search this man, and if he makes a foul move, sh-sh-shoot him as quick as you can! Now l-l-look sharp and not let him get the b-b-best of us all,"

Si advanced to comply ; Rube started to join him, but Lem motioned him back.

"You and marm must keep on the w-w-watch for the redskins. S-S-Sue will stand ready to help Si and me if we n-n-need her."

Then to their guest, who stood uneasily shifting his feet :

"If that w-w-wound in your leg don't p-p-pain you too bad, I wish you'd stand still."

The man complied with a grim smile. The search only brought forth a concealed pistol, with a small stock of ammunition for the same.

"Take care of 'em, S-S-Sue," said Lem, handing the articles over to his sister. "He won't n-n-need them while I'm 'round to protect him !" the youth dryly added.

"Hope ye're satisfied," said the stranger.

"I'm not, and d-d-don't expect to be while you s-s-stay under this roof."

"Want me to go out and be tomahawked by them varmints, do ye ?"

"No. But if you're what you p-p-pretend to be, give us your name, and tell where your cabin stood. I don't think there were many s-s-settlers within twenty miles that we haven't heard t-t-tell of."

The man hesitated only a moment, and then answered :

"I s'pose it's all right in ye to ax questions. My name is Solomon Wheeler, and I built my cabin about eight miles south of here, on the meader. It ain't been built more'n a year. That 'ere is the solemn truth, and I'll swear to 't if ye ain't satisfied."

"You needn't be to the t-t-trouble to s-s-swear," Lem replied, turning his attention to a loophole, through which he took a survey of the clearing.

The darkness of night had settled fully upon forest and clearing, and with it had come a silence that was almost oppressive. There were few nights

indeed that the dismal hooting of owls, or occasional signal cry of a wolf, or more constant and nearer song of whip-poor-wills, did not testify to nocturnal life on every side of the lonely cabin home. But now all these sounds were hushed, or if they were heard at all it was only at such rare intervals, and with such brief continuance that they were more unnatural and startling than the stillness.

As Lem's gaze swept the narrow range commanded by the lookout he thought of Davey, and wondered if Winawis would succeed in his quest; and of his father, who had so mysteriously chosen to leave a defenceless home.

"I never understood him, and he never tried to understand me, and now it has come to an open fight betwixt us?" he reflected, with a strange feeling of bitterness, as though fate had shown him the hardest kind of injustice.

"If he had been honest with us from the first, and told us what he meant to do, we shouldn't have been obliged to follow him about whenever it suited him to pull up stakes and plant a new home. We could have done so much better by ourselves. Instead of being a help, he has kept us down."

The youth's reflections were broken by a hand on his arm. He knew whose hand it was without looking, and said in a low, gentle tone:

"Marm, dear, what is it?"

"About this Solomon Wheeler, Lemuel. Did you ever hear of him afore?"

"Yes. F-f-father has spoken of him."

"They have been hunting together, I've heard him say," said Mrs. Fowler, thoughtfully.

"And never f-f-fetched home any g-g-game! And likely they've been fishing without c-c-catching any f-f-fish. It l-looks as if father and this S-S-Solomon both knew how to tell l-l-lies if they had poor l-luck in hunting and f-fishing."

"Then you think this man is here for mischief?"

"It'll be the w-worse for him if he is," was Lem's

response. As he said this he slowly faced about and laid a large palm on each of his mother's shoulders, looking tenderly down at her from his six feet of height.

"Marm," he exclaimed, his voice trembling with emotion, "you had t-t-three boys big enough to fight for you when father d-d-deserted us, and they're going to stand by you and their home as long as they can l-l-load and f-f-fire!"

"God will stand by us all if we're as brave as you be!" was the tremulous response.

Their guest was asleep and snoring again. Si and Lem were at the lookout. Rube dozed on the settee, with his curly head resting against the log wall of the cabin. Sue and her mother sat and talked in low tones. For an hour affairs in the cabin were precisely the same. Then Si abruptly crossed over to Lem's lookout and spoke to him in a low tone.

"N-n-now is the t-time, then," was Lem's response. And both silently went over to where their guest lay asleep.

As they approached the sleeping stranger, Lem took some thongs from his pocket. They were the same which he had used for binding the Indian earlier in the day.

"I had better hold him and l-l-let you tie the knots. Mind, though, and t-t-tie 'em tight."

Without a second's delay, Lem quickly bent over the man and seized his wrists. There was a snort of alarm from the suddenly awakened stranger, who made a powerful effort to throw off the grasp which was upon him. But Lem had made sure of his hold, and although the man succeeded in rising to a sitting posture, he was thrown back again with enough of force to teach him more caution.

"Sue, come and sh-sh-shoot this man if he d-don't lie still!" exclaimed Lem, and the resolute girl advanced so promptly, pistol in hand, that Solomon

Wheeler learned still further prudence from the grim threat.

"T-t-tie 'em strong, Si—his wrists first, then his ankles. S-s-so—you're d-d-doing well."

It was all done in a moment, and their guest lay on the cabin floor as securely a prisoner as helpless hands and feet could make him.

"I'd like to know what I've done, that ye should use me this way?" Wheeler exclaimed, in a whining tone.

"We's afeared you might do some damage, a-snoring so, and thought if you was tied up good and strong it would at least keep your legs and arms from falling off," drawled Si. And although the man whined, and even ventured to use a few cautious expletives, the defenders of the cabin paid no further attention to him for the time. Matters of greater importance claimed their attention.

"Now comes the t-t-tug of war," stammered Lem, after he had taken another survey of the forest from Si's lookout.

"Do you think they are going to make another attack, Lemuel?" Mrs. Fowler asked, her anxiety concealed under a calm voice and placid face.

"I haven't any doubt of it, marm. But they c-c-count on help from the inside, that they won't g-g-get. We have got a big f-f-fight on our hands, though."

"And we can't hold out allus, Lemuel. Had you thought of that?"

"I've thought all r-r-round the question; but it don't d-d-do any good to think. We can only k-k-keep as cool as we can and f-f-fight."

While speaking the youth was by no means idle. He tried the brace against the door to see that it was secure. Then he examined all the guns, re-priming those that needed it.

The moon was up, and when not covered by filmy clouds shed a silvery glamor over the clearing, ren-

dering the cabin only too conspicuous to the watchful eyes in the forest. However, the light was unfavorable for strategy on the part of the Indians. If one so much as stepped from the shadows of the woods, he became a fair target for the rifles in the cabin; and the boy defenders had already given good evidence of their skill.

What Si had seen to prompt the action they had taken in making Solomon Wheeler a prisoner was the cautious appearance of several redskins on the edge of the clearing, who began to skulk along within the shadows in a stealthy and somewhat mysterious manner. Lem had told him to announce the first hostile sign observed, and that their guest must be made secure before any attack was made, for he had reason to believe Wheeler was acting under instructions from the enemy, and that nothing but treachery could be expected from him.

When Lem returned to the lookout he saw that the Indians were still maneuvering in the singular manner described. They had crept along a considerable distance from their original position, and occasionally halted and held up their hands as though trying to detect raindrops. Of course this was not their purpose, however, for there was not the slightest indication of rain, nor had there been since the previous evening. In fact, for many days, in spite of occasional thunder-clouds along the horizon, and that oppressiveness of atmosphere which usually precedes summer showers, not a drop of rain had fallen.

The weather had been very warm, and a dry southerly wind had blown almost constantly. Since sunset of the evening of which I am writing there was only a light, gusty breeze that occasionally died out altogether.

"I can't make out what they're up to," said Si, after half an hour had elapsed without any change in the movements of the enemy.

"I guess they're trying to find a place where they can creep up to the house without being seen," suggested Rube, who had been observing them closely while the older boys were engaged in other preparations.

"There are more shadows on the side they s-s-started from than anywhere else," said Lem.

"They can't get very nigh on either side without being seen, and if they've got eyes they can see it as well as we can. There's a strip of moonlight more'n fifty yards wide that they've got to cross, and we have a good chance to pepper them at short range."

This was Si's reasoning, and when his slow mind set to work on a problem he was wont never to let go until it was solved.

"There! Look at 'em now," Rube suddenly exclaimed. The other boys were already looking. The Indians had come to a halt, held up their hands as before, looking up at the clouds which were just then floating across the moon's disk, and apparently exchanging comments and suggestions of a most animated nature. Just then a brisk gust swept across the clearing with a subdued murmur as it passed the angles of the cabin. At the same moment the Indians they were watching abruptly disappeared in the forest.

"Now we shall s-s-soon know what they're up to."

"I'll bet they're going to make a rush for the house," said Rube.

"And I'll bet them redskins ain't all such big fools as Rube takes 'em for," drawled Si. And this latter estimate was soon proven correct..

First, an Indian appeared with his arms full of the dry underwood with which the ground was plentifully strewn in the forest. Then a half-dozen others ran out similarly laden. All dashed rapidly toward the cabin, as far as they could without coming out into the moonlight, which brought them with-

in a little more than one hundred yards of the dwelling. All flung down their armfuls of dead limbs in a heap, which, when the last load was deposited, rose nearly five feet in height. Thus, when they retreated, they did so almost completely sheltered by the pile of dry brush.

"It is about time for us to do some shooting," said Si, with a grimness that betokened a solution of the redskins' mysterious preparations.

"You think they m-m-mean to build a fi-fi-fire?"

"Yes, and a rousing big one."

"Still, I don't s-s-see why they spent so much time m-m-making up their minds where to start it."

"I'm ahead of you, this time, Lem, if I am slow." Si thrust the muzzle of his gun through the loophole as he spoke, and patiently waited for the enemy to reappear.

But the shadows and the intervening brush heap this time shielded the Indians so effectually that the first sign of their return visible to the watchers was the sudden flinging on to the pile of combustibles of armful after armful of additional fuel.

Si fired first, and Lem and Rube followed closely. The guns were given to Sue for reloading, Rube helping. Just then another of those fitful wind gusts swept across the clearing, this one somewhat stronger than those preceding.

"The wind blows pretty straight from that brush heap towards us—don't you think so, Lem?" Si deliberately observed.

But the hint was not needed by the elder brother. The truth had flashed upon him a moment before. And, though the boys fired again and again toward the brush heap, it was but a waste of powder. The pile grew higher and higher, and larger and larger. How many were engaged in the task of collecting and heaping up the great mass of fuel the boys could not see.

“If we could only have had a sh-sh-shower to-day!” was the thought uttered by Lem, and echoed by all the anxious inmates of the cabin, for by this time Mrs. Fowler and Sue were apprised of the danger.

“They’re lighting the heap!” Rube announced. The young defenders saw a faint red glimmer, then a larger blaze, then a great tongue of flame that sent a red flash across the clearing. The combustibles were dry as tinder, and the entire heap quickly became a mass of flame, fanned by the rising wind.

Then it was shown why the Indians maneuvered so long before starting the fire—it was to ascertain the exact direction in which the fitful wind was blowing.

The air was quickly filled with blazing brands, which, borne by the wind, fell on roofs and sides of house and shed in a perfect rain of fire.

CHAPTER VII.

WINAWIS ON THE TRAIL.

It is no more than right that attention should now be turned to the brave young Indian who had volunteered to rescue little Davey Fowler from his captors.

After parting from Si, Winawis exerted himself in the manner already described, to divert the pursuit from the white youth. Having done all in his power in this direction, though ignorant of the issue of his efforts, the young Nipmuck speedily found that he had somewhat overdone the matter, and that he would be fortunate if he escaped capture or injury himself.

He did not suppose the hostile Indians were so numerous in the vicinity. The wood seemed literally to swarm with them. A half-dozen were in full pursuit of the Nipmuck, and as he ran hither and thither with the silence of a shadow, he saw painted savages start up on every side, and heard more than one rifle crack in uncomfortable proximity.

Then it was that Winawis proved his own superior fleetness and endurance. Darting along forest paths, leaping over fallen trees, turning this way or that as he became aware that there were enemies before as well as behind him, he kept on for several moments without an instant's halt. He reached a point where the ground sloped rapidly to the banks of a small, crooked stream which, a few miles below, emptied into the beautiful Housatonic.

By this time a greater part of his pursuers had

been thrown off the track and had abandoned the chase. Two or three only persisted. They were among the most fleet of foot and kept directly in his rear, evidently determined to tire him out and force him to turn at bay, in the hope of obtaining a fair shot at him.

Winawis was annoyed at being forced to travel so far away from the trail of Davey's captor. Every yard of distance and moment of delay lessened the chances of success, and he remembered his promise to Si to restore the captive child safely before the setting of another sun. Hence he resolved to continue his flight but a short distance further.

As he neared the small stream alluded to he purposely allowed his pursuers to gain on him. They got so near that he caught glimpses of them flitting cautiously behind the trunks of trees.

The banks of the stream at that point sloped rather abruptly, and the growth covering them was smaller and denser than the forest trees, partaking more of the quality of shrubbery.

Into the midst of this growth Winawis plunged, making considerable noise in doing so. Reaching the brink of the stream, he stooped suddenly, picked up a stone of half his own weight and hurled it with a loud splash into the water. At the same time he bent his lithe body and sped noiselessly along the river bank until he heard the approach of his pursuers, when he flung himself down in the midst of a dense clump of shrubbery and lay there without stirring a muscle and scarcely venturing to breathe. His foes came crashing through the bushes, one of them passing almost within reach of his outstretched arm. They had heard the splash of the stone striking in the water, and supposed it to be Winawis who had leaped into the stream. The latter was at that point narrow and deep, and they looked up and down the curving brook for some sign of the fugitive.

Winawis feared—even expected—they to use the precaution of looking for his trail before leaping to the conclusion that he had crossed the brook. But, while the readers of histories and romances of Indian warfare have been led to believe the race the most crafty and cautious in the world, they have not, perhaps, stopped to consider that there is such a thing as individuality, even among Indians. Some are much more observant than others, and some, beside the training of the powers of observation which their wild life makes necessary, possess in addition more than the ordinary measure of natural intelligence. In other words, there are Indians who are “smart” and Indians who are a little dull, with all grades between.

The pursuers of Winawis were all young men, and ordinary specimens of their race.

The fact that their foe was a red man made them the more malignant toward him, and doubly anxious to overtake him. They thought they heard him plunge into the stream, and with scarce a moment's hesitation they followed suit.

As soon as Winawis heard his pursuers in the stream he sprang to his feet and hastened up the steep bank. He knew he had not a moment to lose, for his foes would look for his trail on the opposite side of the stream, and, failing to find it, would suspect the ruse and come back with greater fury.

Reaching a point where the stream became broad and shallow, the young Nipmuck leaped into it and waded up the current for a short distance, until he came to a favorable spot for carrying out another simple yet clever stratagem for baffling pursuit.

Several oaks of considerable size grew near the bank, and their branches trailed in the water, which rippled and murmured musically under them. To draw himself up by one of these branches and thence to gain the tree itself and by other branches to reach another tree yet further from the stream and thence

regain terra firma, was almost as easily and quickly done as though he had stepped directly from the water to the bank. But by this method his tracks could not be found within twenty feet of the brink of the stream, which, of course, would render them very hard to find. In fact, to look for them would be like "hunting for a needle in a haystack."

All these maneuvers occupied but a few minutes of time, and Winawis felt assured that he would have no further trouble with his late pursuers.

Upon alighting from the tree he paused to see what direction to take to return to the trail of Davey's captor at the point where he had left it. He had soon set himself right on that score, when he heard stealthy footsteps close at hand. He barely had time to conceal himself behind the tree from which he had descended when the footsteps drew nearer, and he heard the sound of a voice that sent an eager gleam into his keen black eyes. It was the voice of little Davey Fowler, speaking in a pleading tone.

"If you are a dood white man, why don't you take me home?"

"Because the Injuns are close at our heels," said the good white man, in a snarling voice, which was not at all like the plausible tones he had first employed.

"You said you was going to take me to my pa," persisted Davey, who, like his elder brothers, did not lack backwoods "grit."

"And so I am, if you'll only stop your noise. But if you keep your everlasting tongue agoin' I'll leave ye right yere, and let the Injuns eat ye up!"

The good white man was making his way toward the stream, with the child trudging wearily at his side. Reaching the water's edge he suddenly lifted the boy to his shoulder.

"Now, if ye holler, I'll pitch ye into the brook

head fust!" was the man's threat, as he began to ford the stream.

All of which Winawis saw and heard, following stealthily and closely behind.

Ever wary and ever thoughtful, Winawis paused close to the bank of the stream and permitted the good white man to cross with his captive unmolested.

To attack the man in or near the water, the Indian reasoned, would probably result in the child being thrown into the current, and perhaps drowned while the foes were engaged in the hand-to-hand struggle which would ensue.

Crouching in the shrubbery, Winawis waited until the man and child disappeared on the opposite side. Then he rapidly crossed, found the trail, and owing to the necessarily slow pace of those in advance, soon came up with them.

The good white man had again put the child on his feet. The young Nipmuck unslung his bow, and fitted an arrow to the string. The white man was moving so slowly that it would have been an easy matter for the Indian to transfix his foe with his unerring aim. He drew the arrow to the head, and held it here with a strength of arm which was almost marvelous, for Winawis used a bow that few could bend.

In this position he uttered a low, gruff ejaculation that caused his foe to wheel abruptly. Davey faced about also, and joyfully cried, "Nipmut! Nipmut!" and started to run toward him. The captor recoiled, half raised his gun, grew white as a sheet as he saw that he would be pierced by an arrow before he could so much as cock his own weapon, and then quickly dropped the latter and flung up his arms. "Come here, pale coward!" Winawis commanded, without moving a muscle.

The white man advanced, showing his teeth in

that grimace which Davey had at first mistaken for a pleasant smile.

"You'll make a mistake if you shoot me, redskin. I'm just as much agin the settlers as you be, if my skin is white," said the man, supposing at first that the threatening Indian was hostile to the whites.

"The paleface makes a mistake," replied Winawis, without altering his aim.

The white man realized that he had blundered, and hastily tried to amend the same.

"I was taking the young one to his father. S'cuse me for thinkin' you was one of them varmints that're murderin' and burnin' settlers in the valley! I spoke that way just to throw you off your guard, hopin' to get away from you, not noticin' that ye didn't have war paint on. If you's a friend to this young one then you's a friend to me, for he'll tell you I was takin' him to his pa, wasn't I, Davey? I'm a good white man, ain't I?"

The speaker bent upon the child one of those grimaces which had first deceived. But the face and smiles had become, to the sensitive child, the most horrifying sight in the world; with a scream of terror Davey scrambled through the tangle of undergrowth and was soon clinging to the leggings of his red friend.

Winawis lowered his weapon and pointed to the northward with stern gesture.

"Let the pale coward run faster than he ever ran before, for an arrow will start before his heart has beat a score of times."

The good white man did not pause to count his heart beats, for twenty seconds is a terribly brief space of time when it may prove the earthly limit of life. He sprang past the young Indian, caught his foot in the undergrowth and fell headlong, was up again in a twinkling, and away into the sheltering wood. Even then he heard the twang of Winawis' bow-string, felt something like a breath fan his cheek

and saw the arrow quivering in the trunk of a tree a dozen paces in advance of him.

It was no wonder that a chill struck his heart, while he redoubled his already frantic efforts to escape, for he did not know that it was design, instead of his own good fortune, that caused the missile to pass so close to his face, and yet do him no injury. For Christian teachings had made the young Nipmuck more merciful than were many belonging to the white race. Winawis knew that the undertaking of restoring Davey to his home was as yet only half accomplished. They were several miles distant from the cabin, and the woods were full of hostile Indians. In truth, the young Nipmuck was aware of a fact of which the inmates of the Fowler cabin were ignorant. A large party of Indians with French leaders were encamped in the valley of the Housatonic less than three miles from the home in which we have so much interest. They had burned several settlers' cabins in their course, and had taken a number of prisoners. Other settlers were fleeing towards Pontoosuc, having been warned of the approach of the hostiles.

The Fowlers, also, might have been warned, but for the strange perversity of Mr. Fowler himself. Winawis had been on his way to aid them, in fact, when he fell in with the captor of Davey, and afterward with Si Fowler, as he has been described.

The Nipmuck lifted the child in his arms and began working his way back toward the clearing.

Davey clasped his own arms around the young Indian's neck, and with his rosy little face close to the swarthy one of his rescuer, told, in his childish way, the story of his abduction. And with a strange affection growing stronger in the red youth's heart, Winawis held him more closely with his strong arm, and gave such whispered assurances of protection that the little fellow's head drooped upon the Indian's shoulder and the blue eyes closed in sleep,

Knowing that his young charge was asleep, Winawis stepped yet more softly and took extra care that no twig should spring back and awaken the child.

His progress was so slow that night had fallen long before the edge of the clearing was reached.

The Indian silently crossed the open strip and entered the cornfield. There he broke down a quantity of corn with one hand, and spread the stalks so as to make a bed between the rows. Not till then did he relieve his aching arm, and gently lay Davey upon the rude couch. The child did not even rouse.

Winawis had heard several shots from the direction of the clearing, and was eager to ascertain the condition of the cabin and its defenders. But he dared not leave Davey to go forward and reconnoiter, and he had not the heart to awaken him then.

But his curiosity and interest were soon to be raised to a point where they could not be controlled.

He heard firing from the direction of the cabin. Then, from beyond or near it, rose a red glow that indicated the presence of flames leaping skyward.

Then the Indian bent over his sleeping charge and said :

“My little brother must awake now and come.”

Davey was on his feet in an instant, refreshed by his long nap.

“Doin’ to take Davey home now ?” he asked.

“Davey must be patient and come with Nipmuck, and let his tongue be silent.”

He bent to take the boy in his arms again, but hearing footsteps close at hand, wheeled suddenly instead and in a twinkling had sent an arrow clipping through the corn.

That the missile found a victim was evidenced by a savage whoop of pain. The cry served as a signal also, and was answered by other whoops—more than a dozen in all—from every side.

Brave little Davey restrained the scream of terror that rose to his lips, for he knew that it would only serve to tell their foes where he was. He shrank close to his companion, who stood over him with another arrow ready and every sense alert.

Only for an instant did he stand thus. He heard the swift approach of foes, and realized that discovery was inevitable. Again he lifted his charge, and with swift, silent leaps regained the shelter of the wood. In another moment Davey was lifted to the lower branches of a small tree with dense foliage.

"Climb higher—cling—and wait for Winawis!" was the Nipmuck's injunction.

With unquestioning trust Davey obeyed.

* * * * *

"Looks as if they had us now, spite of anything," exclaimed Si Fowler, while Lem and Rube gazed out in consternation across the fire-lit clearing.

"What now, boys?" said Mrs. Fowler, coming anxiously toward them.

"They're t-t-trying to burn us out," said Lem, "and I'm afeared they'll make out! If it hadn't been f-f-father's n-n-notion we might be nearer the s-s-spring, and then we would have a chance to put out a f-f-fire."

Even in their present peril the older son could not forget that all their misfortunes were due to his father's perversity.

"He thought Rube and I wouldn't ever get our growth if we didn't have to lug water half a mile," drawled Si.

"Perhaps the house won't ketch, after all," said Rube, who was anxiously watching the smoke and cinders which fairly enveloped the dwelling.

As the moments passed, and there was no sign of the roof of either cabin or shed having ignited, the others began to entertain the same hope. For fire is a very perverse element, and will sometimes

refuse to burn even when the most suitable fuel is offered it. But presently a cry from Si told the story. The roof of the shed had caught.

"We must p-p-put it out," said Lem, with his usual prompt determination.

"We've only two pails of water," declared Sue. "And we can't spare them. But there's m-m-more'n one w-way."

Lem put on his hat and seized two birch brooms, which had been made only a day or two before and were, therefore, perfectly green. He dipped the brush-ends in the water bucket and hurried out into the shed.

"L-l-load and f-f-fire at the redskins fast as you can," he called back through the opening.

There were grave faces in the cabin as they heard Lem undo the fastenings of the shed door, and, a moment after, clambering upon the roof. They knew that he was taking a great risk, for in the light of the bonfire he would make a conspicuous target for the foe.

But with enough to do, their sufferings for his sake were not so great as they would have been had they been obliged to await the issue in inactive suspense.

Mrs. Fowler and Sue rapidly loaded the guns, while Rube and Si discharged them in the direction of the flitting forms which they occasionally saw beyond the blazing brush heap.

Whether any of these shots were effective or not they could not tell, for the Indians kept up an incessant yelling from the moment of lighting the fire. They kept running to and fro also, adding a fresh supply of fuel to the heap. But, despite their diligence, the dry brush was consumed faster than they could gather and throw it on, for of course they had already collected all that lay close at hand, and every armful now obtained had to be gathered farther and farther away from the blazing pile.

"I don't believe they have seen Lem yet," said Rube as he handed a smoking gun to Sue.

"God grant that they won't notice him at all," was Mrs. Fowler's fervent response.

It seemed as if the utterance of a hope was sure to blast it, for at that moment a louder whoop from the Indians indicated that they had made the dreaded discovery. Several scattering shots from the forest followed, and Lem could be heard running rapidly across the nearly flat roof of the shed. A moment later he appeared at the opening, and tossed the brooms into the room. The instant he appeared they saw blood on his cheek.

"A bullet cl-cl-clipped off a piece of my left ear," he declared. "I could spare it w-w-well enough, though," he added, for nature had indeed been rather liberal with him in that respect.

"Rather a close shave, Lem," drawled Si.

"The fire is out, anyway," said the elder brother, wiping the blood and perspiration from his face.

"A w-w-wet broom is worth a barrel of w-w-water for that business. I could brush off the brands as f-f-fast as they fell, and beat out every speck of blaze that started afore it got a good hold."

"You don't think the danger from fire is over, do you?" his mother asked.

"Pretty nigh. There ain't many b-b-brands f-f-fly-ing now, and the redskins appear to be getting tired of lugging brush. I'll c-c-c-creep out again pretty s-s-soon and see how things l-l-look."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to send our lodger up on the roof and set him to brushing off sparks," suggested Si.

"Just what I was thinking. Mabbe the Injuns w-w-wouldn't fire at h-h-him."

"Good way to make him pay for the whiskey he drinks," said Rube.

Solomon Wheeler during all these proceedings had maintained absolute silence. But now he strug-

gled to a sitting posture and cast a woeful glance at his captors.

"I wisht ye'd loosen that 'ere cord on my legs a leetle grain," he said with a whine.

"Wh-wh-what for?" demanded Lem, looking grimly down at him.

"It's a hurtin' of me, that's why. There's no call for ye to tie me up so. Ye can't say I've done the leastest thing out o' the way, and as for your s'picious, they're onjust and cruel."

"The safest way is the b-b-best way, Mr. Wheeler."

"If ye'd ontie me, and give me a gun, I could help ye amazin'. I'd like nothin' better than to shoot some of them varmints and avenge the dear 'uns!"

"Revenge is a w-w-wicked feeling to harbor against a fellow-critter," declared Lem, so solemnly that the treacherous stranger was silenced.

"Them redskins are goin' to make things warm for us pretty soon, or I miss my guess!" exclaimed Si, with more alarm than he often displayed.

Fully a score of warriors had appeared in the vicinity of the fire, and even as Si spoke they started at a run toward the cabin, yelling furiously, and brandishing their tomahawks in a most belligerent manner.

"G-g-give 'em a v-v-volley, quick!" stammered Lem.

Not only the boys, but the mother and sister obeyed this command, bringing all the guns in the house into requisition. For, like most frontier homes, the dwelling of the Fowlers was a private arsenal in the number of weapons of various sorts which had been collected. In fact the supply of guns and pistols was Mr. Fowler's only point of liberality. He hardly ever returned from one of his protracted and mysterious hunting and fishing expeditions without bringing one or more new

weapons, which he professed to have "found in the woods."

"Hunters and Injuns are careless about such things," he would sometimes remark when surprise was expressed at the frequency of his "finds." Upon one occasion he carried a number of guns away, and if his word is to be taken, sold them at Pontoosuc.

Five rifles, discharged simultaneously from the cabin, was too formidable a foe to be faced. Two of the Indians fell, and the others only paused long enough to pick up the unfortunates. The boy defenders sent two or three pistol-shots after them, to add to their panic. A moment later the clearing was as deserted and silent as though there were not a foe within fifty miles.

"They w-w-won't try that caper again till the moon g-g-goes down," declared Lem, while they all set to work reloading.

"The moon won't help us much longer," said Si, an hour later, as he saw that more than half the space between cabin and forest was darkened by the lengthening shadows.

All realized that the unequal contest was approaching a crisis.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT DAVEY OVERHEARD.

“Climb higher and cling !” was the command of Winawis, and from no other would it have been obeyed so implicitly, without remonstrance, by little Davey. So perfect was the child’s confidence in the young Indian that had the latter told him to leap into the Housatonic he would certainly have done so, believing that his red friend would find a way to save him.

The tree in which the child had been deposited was small, and the branches grew so thickly that Davey found it easy to clamber up among them. Of course it was intensely dark around him, and more perfect concealment could not have been found.

Davey did not realize his danger sufficiently to make him afraid. “The dark” was more fearful to him than the Indians with whom the forest swarmed. Indeed, he would much rather have fallen into the hands of a dozen redskins than to be recaptured by the person calling himself a good white man. The horrible smirk of the latter would linger in the boy’s memory like a nightmare, as long as he lived.

He saw his red friend dart away into the wood, and heard savage yells from pursuers. He saw several dark forms flit along under the tree ; one paused directly under him, and thinking it might be Winawis come back, Davey began to descend. In doing so a twig was broken off and fell upon the tufted head underneath, causing the owner to upturn his dark face and strive to pierce the foliage with his vision. Then Davey saw that it was not

the Nipmuck, and he hastily scrambled upward again, making no small amount of noise in doing so. His very lack of ordinary care saved him, for the redskin supposed it was some animal among the branches, and for his own safety lost no time in getting out of the way.

The moments dragged slowly to little Davey. To keep listening, listening, and straining his eyes, was so tiresome and such a sleepy task withal that his child nature succumbed. His listening ears were filled with a strange whirring sound, and presently the good white man grinned into his face, and suddenly seizing him, tossed him high in the air. Then down, down he came, and struck with a thump that awakened him from the doze into which he had fallen. And it was not all a dream—the falling part was real, for he had tumbled from his perch in the tree and lay on the ground at its base, while an aching spot on his head indicated that he had added another of those characteristic mishaps of childhood—a resounding bump.

He was frightened and hurt, and so thoroughly miserable, with the awful darkness all around him and the pokerish whispering of the wind in the branches overhead, that it was only by a most heroic effort that he kept from crying. The tears came indeed, but not a sound passed his firmly-compressed lips.

His first impulse was to try and regain his place of concealment. But, finding the lowest branches were beyond his reach, he gave up the attempt, and a moment after his attention was taken by the sound of voices so close at hand that he started to run away. Then he received another fall and a stinging scratch across his face that started the blood. Still he did not cry out. With a sort of defiance of misfortune he stood still with his back braced firmly against the tree from which he had fallen.

He stood thus for what seemed like a long time, and heard those voices all the while, their position remaining exactly the same. This was too much for his curiosity, and he began cautiously to work his way, on hands and knees, toward them. He soon perceived the glimmer of a light and a moment after was gazing with wide, wondering eyes, through a mass of interlacing shrubbery upon a small camp fire, with a white man sitting upon opposite sides of it, and one of them toasting a piece of meat on the end of a spit over the smokeless blaze.

Only one thing restrained Davey from springing forward and crying "Papa!" The person on the opposite side of the fire was leaning forward, his elbows on his knees and chin resting in his hands, and while Josiah Fowler talked this other kept showing more and more of his teeth after a fashion that Davey had seen only one person display—the good white man. And this was enough to make Davey crouch down behind the screening bushes and almost hold his breath, while he heard every word that passed between the two men.

"No, it doesn't pay," Mr. Fowler was saying, as he slowly turned the spit, and watched the meat as it gradually became of a savory brown. "If I had known what it was goin' to lead to I shouldn't have follered it. For a single man like you it's different. A man don't like to see his family abused, or to think maybe they'll all be butchered by his friends. If a man has a family that ain't over particular—that's willin' to foller him, and that won't set up to do as they're a mind to agin' him, that is different. But my family ain't that kind. Sometimes I don't care if the Injuns do clean 'em out. They had no need to be so confounded stubborn?"

"You air rather of a sot man yourself when you be sot, ain't ye?" the other ventured, his habitual grin broadening.

"I've a right to be. But who ever heard of a man's boys setting themselves up and telling him what they will do and what they won't!"

"Not many would dares'ter if they had fathers like me."

This was savagely spoken, although the good white man still, to Davey's eyes, appeared to be smiling. Of all malignant beings on the face of the earth the man who smiles while uttering savage threats and thinking of cruel deeds is the most to be feared.

"When boys get grown up as big or bigger than you are yourself it isn't so easy keeping 'em under," said Mr. Fowler.

"That's because ye don't begin right with 'em. I'd like to see the boy that would dare stand out agin' my father! I jest started out for to do it once. That's what I got for it."

The good white man bent forward, pulled down the collar of his shirt, and even from where Davey crouched he could see a long, livid scar, which looked as though the flesh had at some time been cut to the bone with a blunt instrument.

"Think I'd stand out after that?" asked the man.

"I don't know," Fowler answered. "I never struck my boys, and never really wanted to till last night and night afore."

"I was eighteen when I got that clip with a hickory stick," the good white man went on, resuming his original posture and grinning at the fire.

"My Lemuel is a little more than that," said Mr. Fowler.

"Take a harder clip to fetch him to terms, then. Discipline is what boys need. And some gals need it too. Now, if I was in your boots I'd go down to that 'ere cabin of yourn and tell 'em it was best for 'em to come along with you. And the fust one as sot out to oppose ye I'd lay 'em out with some sich

a cut as mine was. I didn't know nothin' after it for nigh onter two days. But when I got 'round agin' I was cured of standin out agin the old man."

Mr. Fowler plucked some broad maple leaves from an overhanging branch and spread them on the ground. Upon the tablecloth thus improvised he placed the roasted meat, which Davey now saw was a dressed partridge, and very plump and tempting it looked. With a large clasp-knife the wild fowl was divided, and then the good white man reached forward and greedily seized his share. Davey shuddered as he saw him tear the tender flesh from the bones of the fowl with those constantly visible teeth.

"I have a mind to try your plan, Silas," said Mr. Fowler after a long period of silence.

"Ye won't have to hit more'n the oldest one a clip," observed the other as he vigorously worked his large jaws.

A moment before the utterance of these last quoted remarks Davey's gaze wandered to the opposite side of the small opening, and there he beheld the face of Winawis, the young Nipmuck, also watching and listening.

* * * * *

The moon sunk behind the wood and darkness settled upon the clearing to add to the danger with which the cabin and its young defenders were threatened.

It is under such conditions as these that one may realize that it takes sixty very long minutes to make an hour. Not one of the boys dared for a moment to relax his vigilance now. A faint glow still marked the spot where the Indians had built the bonfire, while the forest beyond looked black as midnight, and to have discerned the form of a red-skin outlined against such a dark background would have been next to impossible.

But the longest hours have to end some time, and

so did these, one after another, until a joyful exclamation from Rube broke a protracted period of silence.

"I b'lieve it's growin' light."

"And no Injuns yet," said Sue, who had done as good sentinel duty during those hours of suspense as had her brothers.

The sky to the eastward was unmistakably brightening. The glow of the fire had died out. A more absolute stillness than that which now reigned could not be conceived.

"I d-d-don't understand it," said Lem, after taking an observation on each of the four sides of the cabin.

"Looks as if the redskins suspected we were stronger here than they s'posed at fust, and they'd given up the battle," observed Si.

"That isn't very likely. If they g-g-give up every time they found a p-p-plucky set of settlers they wouldn't do much d-d-damage. They are generally shy of b-b-bullets, and when they find they can't have things their own way they try s-s-strategy. They're a c-c-c-cowardly lot, but they manage to clean out some pretty strong settlements when they b-b-begin."

"I don't believe they've given up yet," declared Sue. "Like enough we bein' here sort of by ourselves there wan't many of 'em left to do the work. Most of 'em are like to have gone further, to attack a settlement or where the white folks are more plenty."

"You think enough are l-l-left to hang round and w-w-watch for a chance to p-p-pick us off if we stir?"

"I'm afeared so."

"They think they'll be sure of us by waitin' till we're out of food and water," said Si, and this suggestion did not tend to raise their spirits.

"We could hold out a day or two as far as water

is concerned," said Sue with a glance at the buckets which were still nearly full.

"You f-f-forget the c-c-cow."

"That's so. She does have to drink, doesn't she."

"If it comes to the w-w-worst we would kill her. Then we should have enough to eat f-f-for a while."

"Fresh meat wouldn't keep a great while this weather," drawled Si, who seem to be in a mood for making depressing suggestions.

"Without salt, that's a fact," said Sue. "But we've got a pretty good lot of salt, and could pickle a good, big lump of meat with it, if it came to that. But I hope we won't have to kill the cow. We've got enough to eat 'thout her, such as 'tis."

"And if we can git water to make brine of, we can get water for the cow to drink," said Rube, who could be practical once in awhile.

And so they discussed ways and means until day fairly dawned, and it was noticeable that, in exact proportion as daylight increased, so were their spirits raised. They were then able to relax their vigilance somewhat, and Sue prepared their morning meal.

"Have to ontie that 'ere man so't he can eat, I s'pose," was Mrs. Fowler's ungracious reminder.

"Don't know whether we will or not," said Si.

"We'll see how the v-v-vituals is going to hold out afore we throw much on't away on h-h-him," stammered Lem, which advice was unconcernedly heeded by the rest of the family, while Solomon Wheeler became more and more uneasy at the prospect of receiving slight favor at the hands of his hosts.

"Hope ye wouldn't see a man starve!" he exclaimed at length, as no move was made toward offering him any breakfast.

"If you seem to be starvin' we'll all look t'other way so's not too see ye," was the drawling rejoinder

of Si which caused a general smile and started Solomon's whine afresh.

"Mabby he would like some of the stuff we giv' him when he first come," suggested Mrs. Fowler, who, seeing in this man one of the unwholesome comrades of her husband, felt rather spiteful toward him.

"I don't mind if I do take a leetle drop," said Wheeler, brightening up. "Fact is, there's a leetle pain in my stummick, and suthin' warmin' might be better for me than hearty vittles, to begin on."

"He means the catnip tea, doesn't he, Lem?" inquired Sue, to which there was a prompt reply in the affirmative.

Wheeler groaned, and anxiously protested that he "couldn't abide the yarb nohow." He was finally given a rather sparing quantity of food, but not a drop of whiskey was offered him.

"The question is, whether it's safest to k-k-keep that man here and f-f-feed him till we're sure the danger is over, or let him go and have another enemy to l-l-l-look out for?" said Lemuel, a few hours later.

While this important question was being discussed, all were electrified by the announcement that two men had appeared on the edge of the forest and were advancing unconcernedly toward the dwelling.

"One of 'em is father," declared Si, a grim look coming into his face.

"Who's t'other?" Mrs. Fowler inquired. Her voice trembled with anxiety, and the look that she sent to the faces of her boys showed an inexpressible dread of another encounter between them and their father. She understood him better than they did. Perhaps she knew more about his mysterious excursions from home than she had yet dared to tell them. There is many a brave woman who has stood between a husband's sins and the retribution

which his own children might otherwise visit upon him. 'To be the wife of a criminal involves more than to be the son or daughter of one, if the wife be all that heaven ordained her to be. It is not for her to raise a finger to bring punishment upon him.

"A thin, shanky-built man, t'other one is," said Si, who was watching them closely.

"Looks pleasant 'nough from here," said Rube. "He seems to be smiling at a great rate, though he ain't very handsome."

"One thing about it," said resolute Lem to Solomon Wheeler, "You've got to be kept out of the w-w-ay till he is gone."

"What can we do with him?" Si came quickly forward as he spoke.

"P-p-put him out with the c-c-cow. But wait. He has got to be m-m-muzzled."

To tie something tightly over his mouth to prevent him from making an outcry was the work of a moment. Sue's strong hands lent ready assistance.

"And if he tries to make a rumpus one of us'll go out and shoot him," said Si.

Their unwelcome guest was dragged through the opening into the shed, and left to his own reflections. This disposal of him had scarcely been made before a loud knock sounded on the cabin door, accompanied by the commanding voice of Josiah Fowler.

"Shall we l-l-let him in or not?" asked Lem appealing to his mother.

"Yes, yes—let him in," was the nervously-spoken reply.

Lem Fowler was never before so tempted to oppose a mandate from his mother, for it was most strongly contrary to his judgment to admit, unquestioned, one who had certainly given them no grounds for trusting at this critical period.

Then he reflected that perhaps, after all, he had

been too hasty in judging his father. He was young and impetuous, and years of discontent had prejudiced his mind. It is so easy for youth to be mistaken, and in most cases it is so when opposed to the experience of age. Lem was a thoughtful youth, and all this passed through his mind in the moment that he was appearing to undo the fastenings of the door. For in reality he had undone none of them when he again turned to his mother, and in a low, unsteady voice asked: "Are you sure its b-b-best mam? Hadn't we better find out what he w-w-wants first?"

"He wants us to go away with him, like enough," was the reply. "But we ain't obleeged to go if it don't look to be best. We can tell him no, as we did afore, and that'll be the end on't. But he may say somethin' that'll be to our advantage to listen to. Your father don't allers do as he orte, and a good many men don't, but we mustn't forgit what he is to us, and that he may mean well for us arter all. Not that I would have you go with the enemies of the settlers, or do anything wrong to please him. But we don't want to do wrong in tryin' to do right, Lemuel."

Lem undid the fastenings while Mrs. Fowler was speaking, and as she finished the door swung open and Mr. Fowler entered. A glance at his face made Lem wish he had not admitted him, but it was too late then. Fowler's companion came in also, and bowed and smiled at Mrs. Fowler and Sue with a vast display of very prominent teeth.

"We've brought ye amazin' good news," said this person, seating himself uninvited, and bestowing a smile on Sue that "made her blood run cold," as she afterward expressed it.

"The Injins that have been attacking the cabin have gone down the river," said Mr. Fowler, speaking in a somewhat unsteady voice. Rube recalled hearing him use the same unsteady tones upon one

or two former occasions when he came home, as he said, "very tired." At such times, too, he was wont to be more than usually taciturn.

"Then we won't have to give up our cabin, arter all; shall we, Josiah?" exclaimed Mrs. Fowler, placing a hard-worked hand on her husband's arm.

"All the more reason for you to get away, now you have a chance," he replied. "I didn't say the danger was over, did I?" he continued impatiently. "It's absurd for you to stay here when everybody else is fleein' to the settlements. You was lucky to drive off that lot, but there's more comin', and they won't leave a cabin along the valley, exceptin' in one or two big settlements. Pontoosuc ain't safe even."

"Where would you have us go?"

"I'd have you go with me. I can take you where you'll be safe. But if you go to startin' off alone you'll git into trouble."

Mr. Fowler avoided meeting the gaze of either Lem or Si while speaking. But his companion, with a constantly broadening smile, looked from one to the other, and occasionally bestowed upon them a sly sort of wink, as though there was some joke a-foot which he and they were bound to enjoy by and by. As for Sue, she came in for more of this man's hideous smiles than all the others together.

"I don't see how you can git around so, Josiah, without none of the Injuns molesting ye," said Mrs. Fowler, with mildly expressed doubt.

Her husband's face, a little flushed when he first came in, became more so now. His eyes blazed with a passion which he seemed to have been restraining with difficulty all the while.

"It ain't any of your business how I git 'round!" he cried, with an expletive. He flung off the gentle hand on his arm and glanced around the room with terrible ferocity. Never before had they seen him

give away like that. And yet Lem and Sue, at least, had instinctively realized that he was capable of it under certain conditions.

"Let's all be calm as we can," said Fowler's companion, without relaxing that hideous grimace which Rube, and little Davey also, had at first mistaken as a sign of good humor.

Si, standing near the single window, looked at Lem. The latter shook his head, and both maintained the silence which had not been broken since the entrance of their father. Sue drew nearer her mother, and her sweet face was not one whit less determined than were those of the older boys.

"Father!" she exclaimed, in a reproachful voice. He turned upon her, raising one clenched hand.

"Don't you dare to interfere, Susan!" he retorted. "Don't you dare to do it!"

The good white man rose and put a restraining hand on the upraised arm. The fire which his insidious speech had kindled threatened to become a bigger blaze than intended—or, rather, it was burning too rapidly, and might too soon burn out altogether.

"I wouldn't Josiah—not to her!" he said, smiling at Fowler and then at Sue. "She's pretty nigh a young lady, and mighty likely to look at, too."

The upraised hand fell, and the enraged man's gaze wandered from the face of his daughter to that of the elder son.

"It's better for all on us to listen to reason," the good white man continued, with the mild air of a peacemaker, and bestowing his smiles on each inmate of the cabin in turn.

"They've got to listen to't," said Fowler.

"And they will, of course," averred the good white man. "Ye see," he continued, "it happens that we—your pa and me, and one or two other peace-lovin' men—are engaged in trade of one sort and another, and we're obleeged to dicker with the

white settlers and Injuns, both good and bad, and even with Frenchmen, if they happen to be of a peace-lovin' sort, and so, in one way and 'nother, we have a 'vantage. In short anybody as is under our care, is purty sartin to have no trouble with the savage varmints that are agin' e'n a'most everybody else."

Here was a good deal of talk, but Lem followed it closely, and perceived that it disclosed nothing. It was plausible but evasive.

"I can't protect you if you stay here," said Mr. Fowler, "and I can't do anything for you anyway unless you come with me now. I give in to ye the last time I was here, thinking a day or two of danger would fetch ye 'round. I shan't give in again. Your mother will go if the rest of ye do; and the rest of ye are children of mine, and ye'll do as I say!"

Still neither word or sign from Lem or Si. The mother covered her face with her hands.

"Come," Mr. Fowler impatiently exclaimed. "Why ain't ye pickin' up? I tell ye there's no time to lose. Lemuel, why do ye stand there as though yar was dumb? Git the guns and ammunition, what we can carry, and be lively."

"I've n-n-no right to say what marm shall d-do," said Lem, speaking as deliberately as his stammering utterance would allow.

Fowler did not stop to hear what Lem was saying, but with an angry stride reached the side of Silas, whose gaze did not flinch, although he took a step backward.

"You defied me yesterday," the man exclaimed. "Now you will obey. Put down that gun and come with me! Do you hear?"

Then all noticed for the first time that Mr. Fowler held something in his left hand. They had at first supposed it to be a gun, but now he changed the object over to his right hand and raised it over Si

It was a large yet supple rod of birch, a blow from which in the arms of a strong man might cut to the bone. Lem and Sue saw the object and exchanged glances. There was a quick rush toward the angry father, and before the rod could descend it was snatched from his grasp, broken twice in two and flung across the room. "Father! father!—don't!" pleaded Sue, as the maddened man turned and grappled with his tall son who had disarmed him.

The good white man looked on and smiled, as though this dreadful quarrel and the suffering it must entail were not of his making.

It was over almost before Rube, who had observed the whole scene without taking part in it, fairly realized that it had begun. Such a quick, passionate encounter does not admit of a detailed description. One can picture only the beginning and the result.

Mr. Fowler was sent reeling across the small room, and, his foot striking an article of furniture, he tripped and fell heavily. He did not rise again, and the first one to reach his side and bend over him was Lem. He raised his father's head and let it rest against his arm, while he called for water. Rube brought it in the wooden dipper; the others, except the good white man, gathered around him with white faces.

Mr. Fowler's head had struck with considerable force upon the hewn log floor, and the concussion had stunned him. The water soon acted as a restorative, and no doubt it at the same time in a measure quenched the unnatural passion into which he had been worked. He sat up, looked in a dazed way at Lem, and then rose to his feet, declining the assistance his son would have lent. Staggering across the room he sank upon the wooden settle from which the good white man had risen.

Mrs. Fowler approached him in her quiet manner,

while the boys stood back. Lem breathed hard from his exertion and the excitement of the brief encounter.

"Josiah," said Mrs. Fowler, tremulously, putting a hand on his arm.

"Well, what do you want?" was the impatient retort. He at the same time flung off the conciliatory hand.

"Are you much hurt, Josiah? Your head must have struck pretty hard."

"Little do you care. The idea of him striking me—his father! Where's that stick? Broke, is it? Get me another, will you? I'll teach 'em that they can't defy me!"

This last was addressed to the good white man, who advanced insinuatingly, showing every tooth in his head. Fowler rose unsteadily, and rudely pushed his wife aside.

"As I was tellin' of ye last night," said the good white man, much as though he were resuming an interrupted conversation, "I never tried for to stand out ag'in my dad but once, and I showed ye what come of it. But maybe my dad was a more resolute man than they average. He struck fust. It's a strong p'int to strike fust. But I don't want to interfere in a family affair. Like enough a more yieldin' nature, like your'n, is better. Shall we be goin' along? I s'pose it won't be hardly pleasant for ye to stay here when it's so clear that your boys mean to be marsters of the house. I'm too kind-natured to feel right in stayin' to see a friend abused by his own family. Not that the young lady"—with a smirk at Sue—"has showed anything but a becomin' spirit."

These words, so mildly uttered, were like fire to the excited brain of Mr. Fowler.

"The boys ain't masters here yet!" he cried. He glared about him for something with which to enforce his authority, not noticing that the good white

man had hastily flung open the door and stepped outside. A moment later, with that vicious smile still wreathing his face, this peace-loving individual reappeared with another birchen rod, stouter than the one Lem had broken.

Only Lem observed this significant action, and he instantly divined that the new rod had been provided beforehand by the stranger for this very emergency. And before the good white man could cross the threshold he was confronted by the tall youth, whose stalwart form effectually barred the way.

"W-w-w-we don't need any of your h-h-help," said Lem.

"Just as your dad says about my comin' back in," said the good white man. "It ain't for me to interfere in a family onpleasantness, unless he says he wants me to."

"Yes, yes—come in!" exclaimed Mr. Fowler. "If Lemuel interferes, knock him over. I give you leave." The unhappy man had again seated himself on the wooden settle, with an exhausted air. It looked very much as though he would have been glad to give the battle over to his strange comrade to finish.

A more sudden transformation than that which the good white man's countenance underwent when Mr. Fowler addressed to him the words just quoted could not be conceived. The smile became a vicious leer, and every feature took on an expression to match. It was such a chance as a skilled artist will sometimes give by a single stroke of his pencil to a face he has sketched.

"Ye hear what he says?" the man exclaimed with a snarl.

Lem glanced at Si, who advanced in his deliberate way.

"Shut the door when I say the w-w-word," stammered Lem. At the same instant their enemy

raised the rod and brought it down with a spiteful hiss. The youth had no time to wholly elude the blow. To have leaped backward would have given the man a chance to enter, and Lem received nearly the full force of the blow across his up-raised arms rather than surrender the advantage of his position. The sting of pain redoubled his resolution. Before the rod could descend again Lem had seized it, and in the struggle for its possession it was broken. The man gained the threshold, and to dislodge him was more than the youth could have done alone. In truth, he realized that the stranger was a man of great physical strength, as well as of remorseless temper. In a fair encounter he might have been more than a match for Lem and Si together; but the latter, deliberate though he was, readily saw that the advice of their enemy to "strike first" would be good to follow in the present instance. The result was that the good white man was sent reeling backward under a blow from Si's musket, which struck fairly on the man's shoulder. The door was closed and barred before their enemy could return to the attack.

Mr. Fowler witnessed the brief encounter in a dazed sort of way, and did not seem to realize its import until it was over. Then he sprang to his feet, trembling as much from weakness as anger.

"What have you done?" he demanded, as Lem and Si faced about.

"If we want any l-l-licking done here," said Lem, "we had ruther k-k-keep it all in the f-f-family."

"You've shut the door on my friend. And you struck me," continued Mr. Fowler, with the air of a child rehearsing his wrongs.

"Queer sort of a friend, that man was," said Si, with his drawl.

"I'll do the t-t-talking," interposed Lem, as his mother was about to speak, for he saw that a word from her, in the present mood of her husband,

would irritate him more than anything else. And Mrs. Fowler realized that her dignified elder son was right.

"K-k-keep an eye out for that varmint that shows his t-teeth," was his direction to Si. Then, to his father, in a decisive yet respectful tone :

"That man with the teeth put you up to trying to l-l-lick Si and me, and you ought to have kn-n-own better. You ain't yourself. You're t-t-tired and u-u-used up, and, had better g-g-go to bed. C-c-come."

As he spoke, Lem drew his father's arm within his own, and, to the amazement of the others, Mr. Fowler was led docilely into the bedroom adjoining.

"He may be more reasonable when he w-w-wakes up, and he m m-may not," said Lem, re-appearing a few moments after.

CHAPTER IX.

HOME LIFE ON THE FRONTIER.

Although not a word or hint had been dropped by any member of the family pointing to the fact, yet it was tacitly understood by all that Mr. Fowler's eccentric behavior was partly due, in the present case, to excessive drinking. He was not fairly intoxicated; in truth, they had seen him much the worse, for liquor at other times when he had manifested none of that ferocity of temper toward his children.

"That varmint with the t-t-teeth just winds dad round his finger, and there's more p-p-pisen in his everlasting grin than there is in a whole nest of rattlesnakes," said Lem, in the low-voiced discussion into which all entered while Mr. Fowler slept.

"Been better if I'd used my gun on him t'other day," remarked Si.

"I'd rather shoot him than a dozen Indians," said Sue, with a flash of her dark eyes.

Mr. Fowler slept until near nightfall. But this period was not passed in idleness by the inmates of the cabin, Lem and Si ventured to visit the spring for water, and as no signs of danger were encountered upon the first trip, another and another were made, until all the receptacles in the house were filled with the indispensable fluid. Then the axes were brought into requisition, and a considerable number of hardwood trees were felled, trimmed and cut into eight and ten-foot lengths. These the boys dragged to the house, two at a time.

"We can f-f-fight here as well as anywhere," said Lem, while he swung his felling-ax with swift,

ringing strokes. "But we must b-b-barricade the house. It was dad's notion building so far from a s-s-s-settlement, and now we've got to stay and f-f-face the music."

"Most everybody that tries to reach a fort gets cut off by the Injuns," observed Si, whose ax fell about once while Lem's did three times.

"Yes, and women and children d-d-don't stand much of a chance in the woods. They c-c-can't jump into the river and swim, nor climb t-t-trees very handy."

"Sue has got as much grit as you have," drawled Si.

"Likely she's got m-m-more," Lem admitted. "But I couldn't git over the ground very fast with p-p-petticoats flopping around my heels. She couldn't s-s-swim in 'em anyway."

"She and marm could put on some of our old breeches if we had to make for the settlement." Which suggestion of Si's was adopted afterward, for a purpose which we will not now anticipate.

At noon it was decided to feed Solomon Wheeler as liberally as he might desire and send him forth to shift for himself. The man grumbled at being thus turned out to the mercy of the redskins, but it was patent to all that he suffered from chagrin rather than fear.

"If the Injuns scalp you we'll scalp some of them to pay for't," was Si's comforting assurance as the man took his departure. They were especially eager to have him go before Mr. Fowler should awake.

— Mrs. Fowler and Sue were as busy as the boys. The spinning wheel, which in those days was an almost indispensable requisite to every thrifty housewife, set up its busy drone, and the fluffy rolls of wool were transformed into yarn by the skilled fingers of Mrs. Fowler. Sue, with equal industry, made use of the loom, which it was then a

of the highest domestic thrift to possess. Nearly all the clothes worn by this backwoods family, as well as of many others at that time, were homespun, woven and made.

The useful domestic arts were then "the fashion." Now that the necessity of many of them has passed away, the more luxurious accomplishments take their places. The household furniture of the Fowlers was nearly all home-made, for Lem, Si and even Rube could handle axs, hatchets and hand-saws with much skill. Mr. Fowler though a skilful mechanic when he had a mind to turn his hand to such work, really did but little of it. He would sometimes set vigorously to work on a wooden chair or settle, but before completed it was invariably turned over to Lem or Si. He would have a sudden call to go hunting or fishing.

It might not be out of place here to briefly describe the dress of these backwoods boys.

Their labor being of the hardest kind, and as boys then, as now, were "hard on their clothes," all wore when at work breeches and leggings of leather, and when the weather was cool enough to require it, a leather jerkin also. In summer time all went barefoot about the dwelling and fields—even Sue, who was as pretty and sprightly a young woman as could be found. The boys had lighter garments of homespun wool, which they put on when not at work on Sundays, or their rare excursions to a settlement. Rube's woollen breeches came so frequently to mending that his mother insisted on patching them with leather, both in front and rear, a fact which Si took advantage of by making drawing comments on the picturesqueness of his appearance when "dressed up." Hence Rube affected a dislike of his woollen garments, saying they were "too scratchy" in warm weather.

Such, without romantic embellishment, were the

dress and life of the average settler's family of the time of which we are writing.

The rude log cabin, its plain furniture, the household utensils, all of which represented labor, money ; with the fields of grain and vegetables surrounding the dwelling, represented all the worldly possessions of the Fowlers. This fact, with that of their remoteness from a large settlement or frontier fort, and the extreme liability to capture or death at the hands of the foe if they hazarded an attempt to reach an outpost, were reasons enough for their reluctance to abandon all. They must face danger in any case. The boys, with Mrs. Fowler, and Sue as well, preferred to stay and defend their home.

As the day drew near a close the boys still continued at work. A considerable pile of posts, such as they had been cutting and hauling to the cabin, was collected near the door. They next began the labor of building the barricade, which, however, they were able then to make but slight progress upon, owing to a succession of interruptions.

First, Mr. Fowler awoke and came out. He looked haggard and ill-humored, but stood in the doorway for some time watching the boys without vouchsafing comment of any kind. And the boys, according to their usual habit when he was in one of his moods, said nothing to him. While all were thus engaged, a well-known voice caused the boys to drop their axes with exclamations of joy. It was a childish voice that thus electrified them, and in another moment little Davey was being hugged and kissed by three or four at the same time, including Sue and Mrs. Fowler, who ran out to meet him with joyful cries.

Their delight was turned into alarm on seeing Winawis, the young Nipmuck, who had brought Davey in his arms, suddenly pause in his advance, and with lightning quickness unsling his bow and draw an arrow to the head. A glance told them the

cause for this action. Mr. Fowler had levelled his musket at the Indian the moment the latter appeared ; they were hence confronting each other like duellists.

Sue sprang forward to stay the hand of the Nipmuck, and Lem, no less decisive, caught the arm of his father just as the gun was discharged.

Winawis, seeing the distress of Sue, raised his aim at the last moment and sent the arrow on its flight high above the top of the dwelling.

This action was purely one of mercy, for he knew Fowler meant to take his life, and as the report of the white man's weapon echoed back from the forest the Indian staggered backward and would have fallen but for the strong arms of Sue.

"You would kill our best friend !" cried Lem. In the sweep of passion that came over him the youth seized the gun and wrenched it from the man's grasp. Then, without waiting to see what his father would do, joined his brothers and sister, who had gathered around the young Indian.

"Not bad," said the latter, with a faint smile, while, to show that he was still proud in his manly strength, he drew himself erect.

His hunting shirt on the left shoulder was moist with blood. Examination showed an ugly-looking wound in the flesh, where the bullet had ploughed through in its course. The missile had not lodged, however, and Winawis, without the faintest sign of pain, directed Sue how to put on a bandage so as to check the flow of blood.

"Good," he said when she had finished, and well might he say so, for never was a wound bound up by gentler hands.

As they led the young Indian into the house past Mr. Fowler, neither looked at the other. Mrs. Fowler had come out and little Davey was cuddled in her arms, and despite the child's resoluteness he

could not help but sob a little in that haven of safety.

Mr. Fowler stood moodily regarding the child as the mother caressed him. He did not speak until Lem came out again. Then he turned to the latter and called for his gun.

"I'm going away," he abruptly declared.

"What f-f-for?" Lem was looking the man squarely in the face when he asked the question, and Mr. Fowler averted his own gaze after a moment of silent embarrassment.

"You think you're all smarter'n I am, and can run things better than I can," he replied.

"We don't think any s-s-such thing," Lem protested, in his calmest manner.

"You've turned agin' me," persisted the man. "I'd have done better if I had brought ye up with more lickings."

"T-t-too late to make up for lost t-time in that," stammered Lem.

The man turned to Rube. "Get my gun," he said, and the boy obeyed. He hastily examined the weapon, but started off without stopping to load.

"C-c-come, father, there's no use of our quarreling," said Lem, following him.

The man paused and stood with his gaze fixed grimly on the forest.

"This is your home as well as our'n," the youth went on, and there was a suspicious tremor in his voice that showed a feeling much deeper than the words he was speaking. In that moment he yearned more deeply for a word or look of fatherly sympathy and encouragement than ever before. "If we're p-p-plucky we won't have to give up our home. Let's all hands t-t-take hold and b-b-barricade the house, and hang to it. C-c-come!"

The appeal was so full of sound sense, and so

earnest and frank withal, that it was not without effect.

"It ain't safe for me to stay here," said the man, after moment's hesitation.

"It ain't safe for us to g-g-go."

"It would be if you'd trust me and my friends."

"We d-d-don't know who your f-f-friends are."

The man was silent again, and Lem went on, still more earnestly :

"If you'd only o-o-own it up, father, you'd admit that that chap with the t-t-teeth is a s-s-scamp. If he was a friend he wouldn't advise to l-l-lick your b-b-boys when he knows they're too old for it to do 'em any good. He is of the s-s-sort to get you into h-h-hot water and leave you there. And, father, now we're t-t-talking serious, and there ain't anybody nigh to hear what we say, why don't you t-t-take me into your confidence? I'm pretty nigh being a man, and you ought to trust me. Tell me what b-b-business takes you away from home so much—why you go hunting and never f-f-fetch back any g-game?"

The look that came into the face of the man was one of astonishment rather than anger at this question. He fidgeted with his gun a moment before speaking.

"That's a queer question, I must say," he exclaimed at last.

"It's a q-q-question we would all feel better if you wasn't afeared to answer it square."

"Who is 'all'?"

"Mother, S-S-Sue and the rest of us. You and that chap with the t-t-teeth have some business that you're secret about. You can't expect us to t-t-trust you unless you t-t-trust us."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Fowler snapped his fingers and tried to dismiss the question, contemptuously. But Lem's firm hand rested on his shoulder, and

Lem's fearless blue eyes would not leave his father's face. There were only two ways of escape—by opening his heart to the stalwart youth, or by resorting to an unreasonable burst of anger. For a moment the question trembled in the balance, and even Lem did not dream how near he was to victory until the weaker side of the man's nature succumbed. He turned upon Lem almost fiercely:

"So your mother and the rest of ye have been taking counsel agin' me!" he cried, throwing off the youth's hand.

"Nothing of the kind," said Lem; but his father would not let him explain.

"The minute I'm away from ye," continued Mr. Fowler, in that savage tone which Lem had never heard him use till that day, "you and your mother conjure up all sorts of suspicions agin' me, and talk 'em over with the children. That's why Si and Rube, and even Davey, turn agin' me now! D'ye think I'll stay here and put up with it? Git out of the way or I'll——"

He clutched the gun threateningly, his eyes blazing, his face almost purple. Lem stepped back, and with saddened eyes watched the strange man striding off across the clearing.

"What did father say?" asked Si, who came out to meet Lem before the latter reached the house.

"I tried to get his c-c-confidence," said Lem, in a low voice.

"How did you make out?"

"He got m-m-mad again. I wish he'd stay here and open his h-h-heart to us. I have a feeling that the time will come when he'll n-n-need us worse than we ever needed him."

The boys resumed work on the barricade, the method of building which we will presently describe. Winawis joined them, lending a willing hand, and his natural craft enabled him to make

many valuable suggestions which would not otherwise have occurred to the brave young defenders. All were thus engaged until twilight came again. Their operations were interrupted in a rather unexpected manner. It was by the appearance of a horseman on the edge of the clearing.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCOUT.

"It is a white man," declared Winawis, who was the first to discover the horseman.

The latter halted on the edge of the clearing and took a survey of the cabin and fields. Then he rode up at a walk, and reaching the upright timbers of the uncompleted barricade dismounted. He would have advanced within the barrier had he not been halted by Lem.

"About f-f-far enough till we know what you w-w-want," he said.

"Whose house is this?" the stranger asked, with a glance at each of the boys, and lastly, with some suspicion, at the young Indian.

"I s'pose my f-f-father calls it his'n." Lem replied, "and his name is Fowler when he's here."

"Josiah Fowler?" asked the stranger, who held his horse's bridle with one hand, and a very long-barrelled musket with the other.

"The same."

"And you're his boys, I take it?" said the other, briskly.

"All but h-h-him," with a nod toward Winawis.

"Where 'bout is he—Josiah Fowler, I mean," pursued the other, with a reserve in his manner that deepened Lem's curiosity.

"That's mor'n I could t-t-tell you," Lem answered. "He went off an hour or two ago. He isn't here m-m-much of the time, anyway."

"He isn't, eh?" And the stranger, who was about thirty years of age and had a generally weather-

beaten appearance that bespoke a life out of doors, sent another sharp glance at Winawis.

"Who's he?" he demanded, with a jerk of his head toward the young Indian.

"A friend of our'n," drawled Si, who had come forward to show that the defence of the house did not depend wholly on the young six-footer who had conducted that side of the conference up to that point.

"Si wants to show off a little, now," said Rube aside to Winawis, but loud enough for the others to hear.

"You better go into the house, Rube, afore it gets so dark you won't darester," was Si's retort, and the stranger smiled and leaned forward a little to get a better view of the younger boys and perhaps to ascertain just how many there were.

"Quite a b-b-brood of us," remarked Lem, interpreting the other's action.

"I should say so. Putting up a defence, are you? Had some trouble with the Injuns?"

"A little," said Lem.

"I guess they had more trouble with us," was Si's remark.

"I should think so, if your father is as plucky as you seem to be. You have a fair show for making a good fight here. The Injuns can't get very nigh without coming out of cover, and they're mighty shy of doing that when bullets are flyin'. Most of the settlers cut and run as soon as they hear somebody say 'Injuns.' I take it that your father hated to give up his home?"

This query was spoken with such an indifferent air that none of the boys perceived the deeper motive behind it. The black eyes of the young Nipmuck, however, fixed all the while on the face of the stranger, brightened with intelligence.

"He wouldn't shed many t-tears over g-g-g-giving it up," answered Lem. "He advised us to r-r-run or surrender. But we'd rather f-f-fight."

"So it isn't the old man that directs the building of this affair?" pointing at the embryo stockade.

"Not at all."

"But he's ready enough to let it keep the Injuns' bullets' way from him I'll venture," and the stranger laughed in a way to please the vanity of the young defenders. For it was as much as to say, "I see the boys have got more pluck than their father."

"Not that, exactly," Lem hastened to correct. "He's p-p-plucky enough, but we don't always agree."

The youth thought himself very discreet in refraining from all definite explanation of the situation. But the stranger seemed highly gratified by the reply.

"You don't mean to say that this father of yours leaves the defence of the house to the boys?"

Lem took alarm at this and quickly retorted:

"I asked you what you w-w-wanted mister, and I don't remember as you've t-told us y-y-et."

"I wanted to see Josiah Fowler," said the young man in the most self-possessed manner imaginable.

"If he is in the house," he added, "I wish you'd ask him to come out."

"I told you he had g-g-gone away."

"I know you said so, but I've been told things afore now and found out afterwards that I wasn't told right. Oh, you needn't flare up," as Lem showed signs of making an angry retort. "I don't mean that I think you'd lie about it. You might think he'd gone, you know, and still be mistaken."

"F-f-father isn't here," said Lem so decisively that the stranger bowed with polite acknowledgment, saying quickly:

"All right, all right, sir. Of course, you know whether he is or not. I called to see him, that is all, and now I must hurry along. By the way, though, I'll say that you'll need all your pluck in a few days.

If you can get horses I advise you to start for safer quarters. If you can't, you may be as well off here as anywhere. You're a little off the track of the big bands of Injins. They hang round the settlements to cut off careless stragglers. I may be back this way in a day or two and if you're still here we'll see what can be done for you."

The man sprang into the saddle, but did not ride away, as he saw that Lem wished to say more to him.

"We're nothing but b-b-boys," said the youth, "and we're willing to take good advice. We've got a mother and sister who can handle a musket pretty nigh as well as anybody. There's one little chap that can't do anything but k-k-keep us busy looking out for him. If you say we'd better make for a settlement, I'll t-t-tell 'em, and maybe we'll take the advice."

"Where would you go if you left here?" asked the horseman.

"Pontoosuc is the b-b-biggest settlement nigh us."

"No use going there," said the stranger in his decisive way. "There is'nt a white man there by this time, like enough. They was all making for Stockbridge when I passed that way a few days ago."

"What's the good of going to S-S-Stockbridge?"

"They've got a stockade there, and they're making it a sort of rendezvous. S'pose you could git your wimmen-folks and the youngster there without delay?"

"How f-f-fur is it?"

"Twenty mile' or more as a bird flies. Road part of the way, after you strike it. Safer to keep to cover, though."

"Would you advise us to t-t-try?"

"No ; not now, at any rate. There's Injuns 'twixt here and there, and without hosses some of you'd get cut off. That's the plain fact, and you may do as you're a mind to."

Again the stranger started off, but the horse moved at a walk, and Lem walked at the animal's head.

"Who are you, any-h-h-how?" the youth asked, when they were beyond earshot of the others.

"I'm one of the Connecticut valley scouts." The stranger spoke in a low tone, and added with a laugh: "You know the Colonial Government offers a bounty for Injun scalps. So hair is the crop that we scouts are most anxious to harvest, and if you ain't sure that young redskin yonder is friendly, his scalplock would count one for me. I've done something to-day."

The speaker as he spoke plunged his hand into a receptacle hung upon his saddle and held aloft an object that made Lem recoil with a shudder. He had heard of the bounty, and of the hardy, fearless men who traversed the beautiful valleys of the Connecticut and Deerfield rivers, rendering uncounted services to settlers and making themselves a terror to the Indians, who shunned their tracks as they would a pestilence.

"So you're a s-s-scout!" exclaimed Lem, with a new interest in the weather-beaten young stranger.

"And my name is Dan Clayton," volunteered the stranger.

"H-h-hold on!" cried Lem, as the scout again started his horse. "What—what did you want of f-f-father?"

"Never mind, as long as he isn't here," was the answer that came back, for the horseman gave the youth no chance to ask further questions.

There was a tumult of nameless apprehensions in Lem's mind as he returned to his companions.

Lem and Si obtained their ideas for the construction of a stockade during a brief residence near a settlement on the Deerfield river, which was the place from which Mr. Fowler had last removed with his family.

Of course they could imitate the structure which they had seen only on a small scale. They designed putting up a barrier on two of the four sides of the cabin, one inclosing the cowshed, the other the front of the house.

The trees were cut into ten-foot lengths, and two sides of each were hewn nearly square, so that when set upright they would have a close contact of at least three inches. This would guard against penetration by bullets. The tops were sharpened so that it would be difficult to climb over them.

Rube and Si dug a trench two feet in depth, extending as far as they were to build the barrier. The ground was mellow and free from roots, and the use of the spade was easy. They soon began setting the timbers and banking the earth around them. They had not time for elaboration, and as the work progressed it could not be called artistic in appearance. Yet the clear head of Lem overlooked no point of precaution, even to the placing of the loopholes at a height from the ground that would prevent their use by the enemy from the outside, and bringing them right for the young defenders by raising an embankment under them on the inner side.

As evening approached Mrs. Fowler and Sue came out and lent all the assistance they could, and with all working so rapidly, the structure was well toward completion when the darkness of night had fully descended.

Considerable was done on the defence after the departure of Dan Clayton, the Connecticut valley scout, and when they ceased work the stockade was available for shielding them from any shots from the forest that might be fired, although it was far from being secure against an energetic attack.

Bright and early the next morning work on the defense was resumed. The night had passed without sign of the enemy, and the young defenders

had several hours of much-needed sleep. Winawis had volunteered to act as sentinel through the whole night, and when morning came he announced his intention of going out to reconnoitre. Nothing could deter him from his purpose.

"Your red brother can help you more in the forest than by staying with you," he declared. And off he went. In the afternoon he returned with a bundle of venison, with which to replenish their waning store of provisions. But he would not stop to partake of it with them. By this time the stockade was completed, and the inmates of the little cabin in the clearing felt a sense of security such as they had not experienced before since they had first become aware of the presence of hostile Indians. Night came again, and it almost began to seem as though all danger was passed, so many hours had elapsed without sign of the enemy.

"The rest of you go to bed and I'll w-w-watch," said Lem, when night had fairly settled upon forest and clearing.

"We can divide the night atwixt us just as well," said Si. "I ain't very sleepy, and I might as well learn to take my turn."

"I don't b'lieve the Injuns will trouble us much more this time anyway," declared Rube, who naturally took the appearance of security at its face value.

It was finally decided that Lem should watch the first half of the night, and if there were no signs of danger of any sort then, Si should then take his turn on guard.

Before they began to prepare for bed, however, Lem hurriedly entered the house, having but a moment before taken a survey of the clearing from the several sides of dwelling and stockade.

"Wait—s-s-something is the matter," he stammered. "Winawis is coming this way at a run. He made signs for one of us to come out and meet him. You w-w-wait till I come b-b-back."

Si and Rube followed him as far as the wall of the defence, and watched him through a loophole as he went to meet the young Indian.

The latter paused within twenty yards of the barrier, and flung himself flat upon the ground. Lem did the same. The tall grass and weeds nearly concealed them from the observation of Si and Rube, and to any one watching from the forest they would have been quite invisible. Si and Rube could scarce contain their curiosity.

"Why didn't I go as well as Lem?" drawled Si, realizing that the Indian's signals might have been for him to answer as much as for the elder brother, and that by his slowness of wit he was now obliged to endure suspense.

"If he meant you, he meant me," asserted Rube.

"He'd know better'n to expect you to come out away from the house after dark." And Si coolly opened the gate of the stockade and went out where Winawis and Lem Fowler crouched in the grass talking. The latter sprang to his feet upon hearing Si's footsteps. "What are you c-c-coming for?" Lem demanded. They both obeyed a vehement gesture of Winawis and dropped upon the ground.

"I didn't know but I was needed, and thought I'd be on the safe side," drawled Si.

"I t-t-told you to wait." Lem turned again to Winawis and added:

"He will have to know, and so will m-m-marm. I'll tell him."

"But he must stay with his brothers and sister," declared the Nipmuck, decisively.

"Of course. It wouldn't do for us all to g-g-go. S-S-Si," he continued, laying one hand on his brother's shoulder, "there ain't much d-d-danger from the redskins for a d-d-day or two if you only keep a sharp lookout. But there's another d-d-danger just now that I've got to 'tend to."

"It's about father, I s'pose?" Si inquired, as Lem hesitated. The latter nodded gravely and remained silent.

"And that scout that was here to see him last night?" he pursued, showing that nothing of importance had escaped his memory.

"Yes, it's father and the s-s-scout," said Lem. "The scout is hunting f-f-father just as sharp as he's hunting Injuns, and Winawis says that if they should m-m-meet, the s-s-scout would take a white scalp to put with his red ones, and get a b-b-bounty for it just the same!"

Si could see that Lem's face was very pale, and the hand still resting on his arm trembled. But Si remained cool.

"Then dad is an ally of the Injuns, is he?" he asked in his deliberate way.

"I d-d-don't know. He has d-d-done something that he is liable to be shot for, and s-scalped, too, if that keen-eyed young scout is the one to t-t-take him. But it mustn't be. We must d-d-do something to save f-f-father. He must be w-w-warned."

"Where is he?" asked Si. It began to dawn upon him that stalwart Lem was taking upon himself a duty that called for the sternest kind of heroism. He looked at Winawis, but saw nothing in that impassive face.

"You come to tell us that dad was in trouble?" Si questioned. The young Indian nodded.

"And last night dad tried to kill you?"

The Nipmuck's face lighted up as he replied:

"If your red brother wanted revenge he would take it himself. He is not a coward."

"You're a noble chap, Nipmuck," said Si, warmly. Lem had said even more than this before Si joined them, and the Indian was enjoying the reward of true magnanimity through their commendation.

"Where is father?" Si again asked.

"Not far off—y-y-yonder, in the woods. There's others him with, and that s-s-scout is watching 'em."

"The chap with the teeth is with him, for one?" Si suggested.

"Yes," said Winawis.

"What can you do, Lem? If you interfere that scout may take a notion to scalp you."

"Father must be s-s-saved," declared Lem, and his tones were never more resolute. "We must m-m-manage to get him back to the house and then we'll shoot the s-s-scout himself rather than give up the man he wants."

"I hate to have you go off this way, and so will Sue and marm. Was you going with Winawis?"

"Yes. Now, now you are here, you can go back and t-t-tell the folks how it is. Then I shan't have to go back."

A few parting injunctions were exchanged, and then Si hurried to the house.

"Lem thinks more of father than I supposed," said Si, after he had told his mother and Sue of the perilous mission on which the red and white youths had gone.

In the meantime Winawis took his companion directly to a small natural opening in the forest, where they discovered the good white man, Solomon Wheeler, Mr. Fowler and two others conversing quietly around a small campfire.

There were numerous natural pathways through the forest, trod both by men and beasts, and it was along one of these that Winawis conducted Lem Fowler to the encampment.

After Lem had silently surveyed the persons around the fire, the Indian drew him back and pointed at footprints in the path made by heavy boots. And back a little way they found the prints of hoofs, and the spot where the wearer of the boots dismounted.

"The question is, if Clayton is hanging around here now, or has g-g-gone for help?" said Lem.

"The white scout would not go far," declared Winawis.

"Then you think he is nigh at this minute?"

"Yes, and he is not alone. There is another scout with him, and they are waiting for a chance to surprise these palefaces when they are asleep. The time will soon come. See! They are lying down for the night. Only one will stay awake to watch."

They had returned to their point of observation, and what the Nipmuck said was true. To the intense relief of Lem the lot of sentinel duty fell to his father, and the others rolled themselves in blankets and stretched out upon the ground with their feet toward the fire. Lem's mind was intensely active and he did not wait for a suggestion from Winawis. The moment he was assured that his father's companions were nearly or quite unconscious in slumber he stepped noiselessly into the opening.

Josiah Fowler half raised his musket and as quickly lowered it again. He recognized his son, and saw the latter's fingers on his lips as a sign for silence. Lem, upon catching the man's gaze, hastily retreated to cover, motioning his father to follow.

The moment of hesitation on the part of Mr. Fowler was an awful moment to Lem. But curiosity, if nothing more, was enough to impel Fowler to obey the signal.

"What in the world brings you here?" he demanded in a whisper.

"To s-s-save you," was the breathless response.

In a sentence Lem told of the visit of the scout to the cabin, and of the more recent warning of Winawis. Even in the darkness he could see that his father's face had become very pale.

Like the hostile Indians, it was plain that this man had reason to dread an encounter with the indomitable valley scouts.

"You must go b-b-back with me, father," said Lem. "That is what I have come here for—to take you back, and to defend you against the s-s-scouts or Injuns—n-n-no matter which."

Fowler hesitated, glancing at his sleeping comrades. The Good White Man lay in plain view, and the flickering firelight fell upon his vicious-looking teeth, which were displayed even in sleep.

"If I desert them," he breathlessly began, but Lem was already drawing him away.

"D-d-don't wait!" pleaded Lem, quickening his steps, and glancing about them for Winawis. The latter had disappeared.

The moment Fowler lost sight of his comrades a panic seemed to seize him. His stalwart son had need no longer to draw him away from the camp. The sound of snapping undergrowth in their rear seemed to fill him with overpowering terror. He began to run, with Lem just in advance, faster and faster as they got farther from the camp, faster and faster in panic-stricken flight and wild fear of losing sight of the tall form leading the way, and wild fear in his heart of being left alone to meet terrible justice at the hands of the pursuing scouts, or a scarcely less dreaded penalty of desertion from that strangely vicious comrade calling himself the Good White Man.

On and on along the forest paths, leaping over obstructions, imagining the sound of hoof-beats and a panting horse in hot pursuit, and angry shouts in the distance from those he had deserted without warning them of their danger.

We say he imagined these sounds, and so he did. The truth was, his late companions were still sleeping, in blissful ignorance of his departure. And as for the relentless white scouts, they—or one of

them at least—was crouching in the thicket near the path along which father and son were flying, and saw them pass so close that he could have touched them with the long barrel of his rifle. And he did not offer to check their flight, although he bent toward them with a grim smile, muttering to himself :

“That was the big young fellow that stutters, and it was the old man Fowler with him. Runnin’ away from me, it’s likely. Well, I can catch ’em when I get ready, so let ’em run.”

They had nearly reached the edge of the clearing when the form of Winawis appeared in the patch, and Lem halted. His father, out of breath, casting looks of apprehension over his shoulder, and into the darkness on either side, stood close to his son, with one hand resting, as though for greater protection, on the latter’s shoulder. A more marked example of the weakness of guilt, and contrasting strength of self-sacrifice it would be hard to find.

“Wait,” said Winawis, in his low, musical tones. “It will do no good to run so fast. You must not go back to the cabin now, for that is what the scouts expect. They have seen you and know what you would do, and they do not follow now because they would rather wait till you are at the cabin, so they know where you are, and then they take their time. My white brother must lead them on a false trail.”

Lem hesitated. His spirited nature prompted him to make open resistance rather than resort to strategy. But the thought that his way might fail, while the plans of the young Indian would gain the end sought, deterred him from rejecting the Nipmuck’s counsel.

“T-t-tell us your p-p-plan,” said Lem.

“Winawis would take you to a hiding-place that he believes is known only to him. He will lead the

way. His white brother will follow with the pale-face he wishes to hide. If there is danger Winawis will give warning by the cry of a whip-poor-will."

"And if we hear the c-c-cry how shall we know it isn't a real b-b-bird?"

"It will sound only three times, then pause, then once again."

"And what shall I do if I hear the w-w-warning?"

"Winawis will not be far in advance, and will return. His brother must wait and be ready with his gun. Now follow. Winawis will keep in sight at first. When he runs on ahead he will make the cry of an owl so that his white brother can follow by sound."

The Indian began leading the way while speaking, at a silent yet quite rapid pace. After a while he went faster, and it being difficult to keep him constantly in sight, Lem depended on the signals agreed upon, and was thus led by the Nipmuck over a devious route that brought them at last to the crest of a low hill.

At this point there were few trees, but a tangle of blackberry briars instead. One side of the hill—that upon which they had come up on—was a gradual slope. But Lem, recognizing the locality, remembered that the other side was precipitous, leading to a sort of gully, along which the stream at that point flowed toward the Housatonic.

At this point they came up with Winawis, who stood upon the very brink of the declivity.

"Follow close," was his laconic injunction, and he led them down the face of the jagged rock, at the only point where descent was possible. There were numerous clefts and juts, with clinging vines and stunted shrubbery, and to an agile person the descent was neither hazardous or very difficult.

At a point half-way down the Nipmuck paused and said :

“Let my white brother turn away his face until he hears a chipmunk’s cry. Then let him look again.”

It will be noticed that in his speech Winawis persistently ignored Mr. Fowler, for which it is easy to divine a reason. Curious as to his purpose, Lem averted his face, and Mr. Fowler, who had not spoken since the beginning of his flight, mechanically followed suit.

They had scarcely done so when the appointed signal was heard, and facing about, they were a little startled to find that the Nipmuck had disappeared as completely as though the face of the rock had opened and swallowed him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCALP-HUNTER.

The night passed at the cabin without alarming incident, except that the inmates began to feel concerned at the non-appearance of Lem or the Nipmuck. But with the coming of dawn, a horseman rode up to the gate of the defense and coolly dismounted, heedless of a stern command to halt from Si. The courier was Dan Clayton, the scout. With calm assurance he knocked on the gate with the stock of his musket.

"Come, come!" he exclaimed in his brisk, commanding tones. "You mustn't put on too many military airs here—you boys. I bring news. Let me in."

"If Lem was here he'd shoot him rather than let him in," urged Si as his mother and Sue advised admitting the scout.

"There can be no harm in opening the gate for him, now father isn't here," urged Sue, who was perhaps influenced by the ruggedly handsome face and engaging manner of the visitor. Rube and Mrs. Fowler seconded this argument, and Si was secretly glad to yield, although he felt all the while as though he was showing himself to be weaker in decision than Lem.

Clayton tied his horse and sauntered leisurely across the space within the stockade and into the house. Sue placed a chair for him.

"We've let you in and now we're ready for the news you promised us," said Si with a drawl.

"That's the way to talk, youngster," Clayton returned. "I like to see a body that isn't afeared to

“speak right up as if they wasn’t afeared of anybody. The news I promised you is, that the Injuns are coming this time, sure. They’ve camped about eight miles northwest of here, and I am afeared they’ll wipe out everything in their path as they pass along, unless something gives ’em a setback. But they may not touch you here. They have no need to know but you’ve got a big garrison here. You’ve got a pretty likely looking stockade, from the woods, and if you could only manage to keep up a brisk fire when the redskins come in sight they might give you a wide berth. Redskins are a cowardly set of dogs, every time. Are you afeared, miss?”

“I know there’s danger, sir,” said Sue, blushing so prettily that the scout could not conceal his admiration, and from that moment there was more constraint in his manner.

“You know how to fire a gun, I dare say?” Clayton questioned, regarding the resolute backwoods girl with new interest.

“I shouldn’t be afeared to try if there was an Injun to shoot at,” she replied.

“That’s the stuff to make girls of,” the scout exclaimed, turning to Si with an admiring nod.

“She can take care of herself,” said Si, with unmistakable coolness.

Clayton went on to talk about the French and Indians and their cruelty to settlers in the English colonies, and before he got through related several anecdotes of adventure, of such a thrilling character that his listeners were quite absorbed. He boasted of no personal exploits, however. The anecdotes were all of a comrade’s bravery, and never of his own. In spite of the prejudices against him when he entered, he was on a quite friendly footing with all save Si, before he had been in the house an hour.

Si held off for prudence sake.

Clayton glanced several times about the room in a furtive manner. He abruptly asked :

"Where's t'other one? The tall fellow that stammers?"

"He isn't here," Si answered.

"Not here?" The scout's surprise was genuine. He looked from one face to another, and suddenly rose to his feet. There was a slight hardening of the lines on his face as he said:

"I'd rather you'd lie to me, out-and-out, than to quibble. Your tall brother went out last night and he and his father came back afore daylight. I saw 'em. I've watched the clearing ever since and they haven't left it. I know so much. I won't hurt the young chap, but the father must go away with me. I don't want to make ye trouble, but I've come too fur to take that man to go back without him, and he's got to go, fight or no fight!"

Si was awed by the scout's sternness and it fell upon Sue to reply.

"You're mistaken, sir," she said, "if you think you saw Lem and father come back. We haven't seen them, and they couldn't come without our knowing it. No, if you think I'm lying, look the premises over all you've a mind to. We won't hinder."

Clayton did not speak so sharply the next time.

"I only want the truth, miss," he returned, looking at her searchingly.

"Si told you the truth. But if you're not satisfied look 'round for yourself."

"It might be well enough for me to look 'round, as you say." And Clayton rose, and, crossing the room, looked into the smaller room where Davey was still sleeping, and afterward into the cowshed. Before re-entering the house he made a thorough examination of the premises.

"It's all right; they ain't here," he quietly declared, reappearing in the doorway.

"Then you'll b'lieve us when you have ter?" drawled Si, in anything but a gracious tone. The

scout returned to his chair in the most complacent manner imaginable.

"You can be as offish as you like," he observed, bending toward Sue and her mother. They occupied the wooden settle near the door, and there was a defiant flush on Sue's face when he came in.

"But when I tell you what I'm going to, mebbe you'll come down a little," he continued, and something in his tones quickly palliated the effect of his recent doubts.

"When we're telling the truth we like to be believed," said Sue.

"That's natural. And when I'm after the truth I ain't going to take up with anything short of it, if I have to raise the temper of all the women-folks in the colony. But never mind. I was mistaken, though I don't understand how. You say the young man and Mr. Fowler haven't been here at all since they went away?"

"They have not."

"Didn't expect 'em afore?"

"Yes."

"And that young Injun—where is he?"

"He and Lem went away together."

"They went to fetch your father back here, didn't they?"

"I think so."

"I seen 'em all in the woods, and they were coming this way. I thought I was sure of them, but there were some others I wasn't sure of, and I went back to make sure of their being watched. Then I took a nap. Then I come here. I've made up my mind that you don't know what sort of a man Josiah Fowler is. Do you?"

Mrs. Fowler was very pale, Sue was trembling, and neither spoke.

"I thought not," the scout went on, his voice softening. He was silent a moment, and then continued :

"And still you knew there was something wrong about him. By the talk of the boys I know he hasn't stood by you as a father oughter in times like these. You haven't always agreed. That tall boy that stammers and his father have struck fire a little when they were together lately. Ain't that so?"

"Dad knows better'n to stand out ag'in Lem!" exclaimed Rube, unable to restrain his enthusiasm for his elder brother's resoluteness.

Dan Clayton nodded and smiled.

"So I thought," he said. "The father has got everyone in his family ag'in him, unless I'm mistaken. And yet, when Josiah Fowler is in downright danger, flesh and blood tells. All on ye would turn on me to save him, and mebbe it would be right in ye to do it. But I'm going to tell you what I think ye didn't know afore. T'other night, when the redskins were firing at this cabin and watching for a chance to cut one of you off, and the same night when a dozen settlers' cabins were burned up the river, and helpless women and children were shot down and scalped, the redskins had some prime good guns and extra good powder to do the cussed work with—better guns and ammunition than the French could give 'em. How did they get 'em, then? Of a p'ison set of white men that makes a business of trading 'em off, ag'in the laws of the colony. Josiah Fowler is one of them p'ison traders that'll sell powder and ball to be turned ag'in his own flesh and blood. And for the scalps of them traders a big bounty is offered. I was sent here to search out the white varmints, and to take back their scalps as proof that they'd gone out of the treacherous trade. What do you think of that?"

The inmates of the cabin were breathless listeners to this revelation.

Mrs. Fowler had suspected something of the kind before. Sue and Si, of course, knew something was wrong, yet they did not before realize the char-

acter of their father's crime, nor the terrible penalty incurred. Rube could as yet hardly comprehend the import of Clayton's words.

Sue was first to find voice to speak. She advanced and laid a hand beseechingly on the young scout's arm.

"You would not do—do that to my father?" she exclaimed.

* * * * *

Of course Lem knew the young Indian had merely concealed himself as a test of the security of the hiding place to which he was taking them. The white youth was confident that a moment's search would disclose it, for the moon shone brightly on the spot. But he soon found out that the task was not so easy. The face of the rock was broken only by narrow clefts hardly large enough to conceal the little animal whose cry the Indian imitated. There was no shrubbery large enough to conceal a man, or the opening to a cave, and yet the Nipmuck was not in sight.

To add to the tantalization of the moment, there lay Winawis' bow and quiver on a jutting shelf or rock. Lem picked them up, then looked where they had lain, then up and down the precipitous sides of the descent.

Thirty feet below the narrow stream hurried along with its scarcely audible murmur. Its eddies and ripples were silvered by the moonlight, for the opposite bank was low and unshaded. A few alders nodded and dipped to kiss their reflections in the brook. Down the stream Lem saw the narrow, curved wake of a muskrat as it swam across a broader and more placid spot.

Winawis could not have dropped into the water; he could not have clambered back to the top of the ascent. The conformation of the cliff was such that the place of hiding must necessarily be within four or five yards of the spot where the quiver and

bow were left. And Lem, a little impatient at what seemed like his own dullness, set to work with dogged persistence to find his red friend. He hunted over every inch of surface, as he would have looked for a piece of money. Mr. Fowler, in a dazed sort of way, stood and watched him, without taking part in the search.

But the youth's efforts were in vain. He began to feel something akin to superstitious awe. Had he been familiar with the story of the "Forty Thieves," he might have tried a magical "open sesame," and expected to see the solid face of the rock open on noiseless hinges. But the oriental tale was unknown to him, and in his prosaic life there were no imaginings drawn from Eastern myth or story. Winawis had simply hidden himself in some niche, which, perhaps, could only be seen from a particular position. And as Lem persisted, until, realizing that considerable time had passed, and that scouts or Indians upon the opposite bank of the stream could observe them, he was glad to give up the search.

"I give it up," he called, in a cautious tone. "I can't find you, Nipmuck ; sh-sh-show yourself."

As if by magic a section—to so call it—of rock seemed to fall inward, leaving an aperture, through which the young Indian crawled. Then, reaching in with his arm, he pulled the rock back into place.

To Lem it looked like legerdemain, for the fragment which was moved with such apparent ease must have weighed several hundred pounds.

Winawis was smiling at Lem's bewildered expression, and quickly explained the matter.

"Push," he said, "and see how easy. My white brotner has the strongest arms—see what he can do."

Lem obeyed, and used so much more force than

necessary to move the ponderous stone that he was pitched forward with violence.

"It is a cave—not deep," said Winawis. "Room there for four or five men. The rock move easy because it balance so close. We all three could not push it farther than it is now. We can move it back and forth just so far—that is all."

More plainly, the small boulder rested on a small oval surface that, while its equipoise was so perfect, permitted it to be rocked as easily as though its weight were barely a pound. Its play was just sufficient to open a space over the top large enough to admit the body of a medium-sized man to the small cavern beyond.

Winawis had first found it by chance, and it was only by a similar chance that it would ever be discovered, unless someone were watching when a fugitive entered the cave.

"He will be safe there," said the Nipmuck, meaning Mr. Fowler.

"And I will s-s-stay with him while you go back and t-t-tell the folks we're safe," declared Lem.

Mr. Fowler was led to the opening and obediently entered it. Lem tarried outside only for a parting word with Winawis.

"You think the s-s-scouts know nothing of this place?" he eagerly questioned.

"They have never found it," was the confident reply.

"And how l-l-long before they will give up the search?"

The Indian shook his head. "My brother asks to know too much. It may be a long time. But if the white man would live he must not let them see him at all. He must stay here night and day till the scouts have given up the hunt. My brother had best stay with him until another night and then Winawis will take meat to the one in the cave. My brother must not go and come, for the scouts

will watch, and in that may find out his secret. That is the counsel of the Nipmuck."

"And g-g-good counsel it is, Nipmuck," said Lem.

The young Indian's patience and devotion, especially in the defence of the one who so lately tried to take his life, was touching to the appreciative youth. The latter felt as if it were almost too much to accept at the Indian's hands under the circumstances.

"There are more than the scouts to fear," added Winawis.

"What do you m-m-mean?"

"The bad white man with big teeth, and the others with him."

"That's so—I hadn't thought of them. They would be glad to b b-betray f-f-father, now he has left them. They would be the worst enemies he could m-m-meet now."

The Indian picked up his bow and quiver, saying :

"When the sun rises Nipmuck will return with food, if it is safe."

"And if anything should h-h-happen that you couldn't come, what s-s-should I do?"

"Go for food, and be careful as you can. That is all.

The white youth crawled into the opening and pushed the boulder back into place.

"Now, f-f-father," he said, in the dense gloom in which they found themselves, "your only chance is to s-s-stay here till I s-s-say it is safe to go. Your late c-c-cronies are as bitter ag'in you now as the scouts be. If you ain't killed by one or t'other it will be because Winawis s-s-saves you. You must remember who is your b-b-best friend."

Mr. Fowler did not speak, but the other could hear him breathing heavily, as though oppressed by suffering which he could not utter. A crisis had come in the man's life, and it remained to be seen whether good would be worked out by it.

Lem listened for the departure of the Indian, and was presently startled by the report of a gun, coming apparently from the opposite side of the stream.

The youth's heart swelled with apprehension. Listening, he heard a dull splash in the water ; then another gun shot, followed by shouts. These sounds were repeated several times, and grew nearer each time.

"They followed us after all," said Mr. Fowler, in a hoarse voice. A moment later he added :

"You had better save yourself, Lemuel. I ain't worth fighting for."

CHAPTER XII.

WINAWIS AND THE SCOUT.

Instead of clambering back to the summit of the precipice, the Nipmuck descended to the stream and started to swim across.

At the very moment of entering the water he espied several shadowy forms skulking along near the opposite shore.

The thought that perhaps the hiding-place of the fugitive was discovered after all caused him to pause, standing in the water, which was up to his neck, and so motionless that, unless he had been already seen, he would not be likely then to be noticed.

The skulking forms disappeared. At the same time Winawis saw one of the alders move more violently than the gentle breeze could have made it, and an instant later the head and shoulders of a white man were thrust into view.

It was so light that Winawis recognized the face instantly. That was not all. The other's glance, in a rapid scanning of the surface of the stream, instantly perceived the dark head of the young Indian, and so prompt was the enemy's action that Winawis ducked beneath the surface barely in time to avoid a rifle shot, the bullet striking and glancing from the face of the precipice in his rear.

The white man was as decisive in his next action as he had been in the first. He flung down his gun and leaped into the stream, swimming toward the spot where Winawis would be most likely to reappear.

The stream was not deep enough to afford effect-

ual concealment by diving and swimming under water, an art in which the Indian was an adept. Therefore he was at a disadvantage, so far as the hope of avoiding observation was concerned.

Recognizing this fact, he lost no more time in strategy. He could only flee openly—it were better to do that than risk a hand-to-hand encounter.

The foe was a powerful man and viciously persistent. The Indian, too, thought of leading him away from the vicinity of Mr. Fowler's hiding place, for even Dan Clayton, the indomitable scout, were a better foe to deal with than this pursuer, with the grinning countenance and the prominent teeth.

Winawis rose to the surface, marked the space betwixt himself and his pursuer, and then bent every energy to reaching the bank of the stream at the point from which the good white man had come.

The latter did not divine the other's purpose at first, but as soon as he did so he made equally strenuous efforts to balk it. But in the water the Indian was an expert. He doubled on his enemy's course, passed within arm's length of him in doing so, reached the bank, scrambled up from the water far enough to reach the white man's gun which he seized and flung into the stream.

An observer might have thought it wiser for him to have retained the weapon, or to have used his own bows and arrows. But the Indian knew that his weapon could not be depended upon now it was wet, and there was no time to try and miss. Had he not been compelled to dive beneath the surface he would not have injured his bow-string by wetting it then.

He had now rendered the white man's gun useless. The owner did not stop to try to recover it. He followed the Nipmuck, reached the bank just as the latter sprang to his feet and sprang away to—

ward the shelter of the forest, which was not far distant.

Then the good white man uttered a hoarse shout. It was answered from near at hand; Solomon Wheeler and one of the other treacherous traders appeared, saw the fugitive, and both fired after him as he disappeared in the woods.

Their shots were harmless, and they joined their leader in pursuit. The fugitive heard their heavy tread close in his rear, but he did not fear them now. Until they could reload he was safe, and to do that they must come to a halt. To load and fire an old-fashioned musket while on the run was too complicated and doubtful an undertaking to be attempted by many. And no matter how hard they tried, Winawis was by far more fleet of foot than any of them, and after a few moments they kept up the pursuit more from a dogged reluctance to give it up than with any hope of success.

Winawis kept on at a swift pace for some time after he had ceased to hear sounds of pursuit. He at last returned to the stream at a different point, crossed it and made his way leisurely to the clearing.

Just in the edge of the cornfield he flung himself down to rest. Two hours' slumber refreshed him, and soon after daylight appeared.

He was about to approach the cabin when he saw Dan Clayton do so. He, therefore, waited until the horseman came away, some time after sunrise. He then hastened back into the forest too prudent to show himself there at that time, knowing that Clayton would be on the watch, and that he would find a way to trail the Nipmuck back to the hiding-place of the fugitive.

Still he was anxious to get some word to the defenders of the cabin, telling them of the safety of Lem and Mr. Fowler. Winawis had learned to write, and upon a piece of birch bark he traced the

message with a pointed stick and a drop of his own blood as pen and ink. He newly strung his bow, and shot the arrow, the message attached, with his usual accuracy, directly into the stockade.

Whether the message was found immediately or not he did not wait to see, but made his way back in the direction of the hiding place instead. With his silent-voiced weapon it was safe and easy to obtain fresh game, and in a sheltered spot he cooked a liberal supply.

Now came the most hazardous part of his undertaking.

If Mr. Fowler's late comrades suspected the deserter to be hiding near the spot where they had encountered the young Nipmuck they would, of course, watch in the vicinity for his return.

Yet Fowler and Lem would both suffer for food and drink if they were not supplied soon.

Winawis, tireless as the wind, began approaching the spot by a devious route, literally feeling every inch of his way, hiding his own trail, listening, going back to reconnoitre, sparing no toil that could add to the caution of his approach.

In spite of all, as he was ascending the hill toward its crest, beyond which lay the precipitous descent, he heard an ominous "click" from a thicket which he was passing. At the same time Dan Clayton stepped into his path with leveled gun.

"Hold on, Injun!" the scout exclaimed, and the Nipmuck obeyed. The latter did not offer to flee or draw an arrow. He regarded the bronzed face of the scout as calmly as though they had met by express appointment.

"What does my white brother want?" Winawis inquired in his most musical tones.

"He wants you to go to the Fowler cabin and stay there," was the unexpected retort.

"And what if he doesn't wish to go?" said the Indian.

"He must do it any way. That's what." The scout lowered his weapon and the sternness of his face relaxed a trifle, as did the harshness of his voice, as he added :

"You must take that big young chap that stutters back with you. I understand that you're a friend of the family, and as a friend of 'em you must stay where you can to do 'em the most good."

"There will be no danger at the cabin before another sun," said Winawis quietly.

"You don't know whether there will or not," was the gruff rejoinder. "At any rate, I have their interest and your'n at heart when I tell you to go back now and to take the young fellow with you."

"But my young white brother is not with me."

"Ha ! But you know where he is, just the same. Come, redskin, don't be contrary. You know what I'm driving at. You can't save that man from his deserts. I couldn't, for there're others watching for him. But you can save the young chap, and you can both help to defend the family. Now, redskin, mind what I say !" And the scout's voice fairly trembled in his earnestness.

Winawis found himself in a position where his native sagacity failed him. Here was a man whose whole life had been spent in combating Indian strategy, and who excelled the Indians themselves in woodcraft. This was not all. Clayton had great shrewdness, and to deceive him in anything was not easy. He was brave to recklessness, and there was scarce a power or influence in the world strong enough to make him swerve from a purpose on which he was once fully bent.

Besides realizing this Winawis knew there was unanswerable force in the scout's logic. The chances of escape for Josiah Fowler were indeed very small, and it was not worth while for worthy lives to be thrown away in his defence. Lem and

himself would soon be needed at the cabin to defend it against savage assailants. There was nothing really unkind in the advice of this fearless young scout, and even his voice and manner were persuasive rather than imperative.

"Would my white friend desert a brother he had promised to defend?" Winawis asked after a brief pause.

"No. But you don't count that treacherous white trader as a brother, do ye? Didn't he shoot at you yesterday?"

"I did not make the fight for him, but for his son. The young brother is too brave to let them kill his father without doing all he can to save him. He would lose his life in the defence. It is his life I would save, and for his sake I would fight for his father."

"You're an obstinate Injun--did you know it?" exclaimed the scout.

"If my white friend says so," was the calm reply.

"You're contrary as a hog--that's what you are!"

The scout brought his gun down with a thump to emphasize his words. The Nipmuck was silent, and Dan Clayton went on with a gruffness that was not wholly excited by the Indian's "obstinacy."

"D'ye think I couldn't put my hand on the cuss within ten minutes if I wanted to? D'ye s'pose we let ye hide him up without keeping an eye on ye when ye did it?"

Winawis was too sharp not to perceive that all this boasting was unfounded.

"If you know where he is then it will do no good for me to take my white brother away with me," said the Indian.

"It will, too. It will get him out of the way while we finish up the business. See here, Injun—I ain't fooling. If it was in my power to let that miserable critter live, I'd let him. But it isn't. I want to help his family. There's a young woman

there, brave as a soldier, and pretty enough fer anybody. I'd spare her father if it was for me to do it. But it's beyond my power, and so I want to do the next best thing, and that is to save her big young lion of a brother."

"Winawis has listened to all his new friend had to say," said the Nipmuck in a low, firm voice; "but he can do no more than his friend thinks he can do. He has given his word to stand by the young white brother, and he can never break his word. He must do all he has promised. When the right time comes he will take his brother back to the dwelling. But not now."

Clayton scowled for a moment, and then smiled.

"Well, let it go, then. You was going to the hiding place, I take it?"

"I have been there and come away again," was the Indian's crafty reply.

"You needn't be so sly; I don't want to know where 'tis. I wish it couldn't be found. But it will be, and afore many hours, too. I—there! What did I tell ye? Here comes another of the scouts that are bound to clean out the like of that Fowler. Ha! look out or he'll have your topknot—he don't know but you're like the rest of 'em, you know!"

Sure enough, a tall, gaunt stranger was coming toward them and, seeing the young Indian, he half raised his gun.

Winawis only smiled, and made no move toward fleeing from the stranger. The latter lowered his weapon and came up, eyeing the Indian while he addressed to Clayton the terse demand:

"Who's this, Dan?"

"A fool of an Injun who won't take good advice," was the characteristic reply, but spoken in a mild voice that proved the other's sentiments were milder than his speech, as they often were.

"Can't ye make him?" the older scout inquired, with grim gravity,

“It’s hardly worth while, Carter. We’ll have to let him go it and take the consequences.”

Clayton turned his back on the Nipmuck, and the latter lost no time in availing himself of the chance to glide quietly away. That the eccentric young scout really preferred to abandon the search for Mr. Fowler, Winawis was sharp enough to divine. And yet it was not likely that he would abandon it, since he was pledged to persistence, and would be accountable for any laxity of purpose to the older scout.

Winawis dared not attempt then to get food to the fugitives. It began to look as if he would have to wait until sheltering darkness fell once more before hazarding an effort. Yet he did not give it up, except for the hour.

He kept watch of the scouts until they started off in another direction together. He followed them until he became satisfied that they were looking for someone besides Fowler then, and that they would not be likely for some time to return to the vicinity of the fugitives’ concealment.

Then, after many tedious precautions which only the patience of an Indian could have carried out, Winawis made his way to the entrance of the cave.

A cautiously uttered signal and the boulder fell back. In the cave the Nipmuck found Fowler and Lem as he had left them, and explained to them the difficulties which he had met when leaving them early in the morning.

Their interview was brief and rapid, and then the faithful young Indian went away, leaving behind the plentiful supply of food he had prepared.

To the prisoners in the small, dark cave the time dragged wearily enough. Mr. Fowler was not inclined to speech, and Lem deemed it wise to humor his mood.

As night approached, the youth made ready to depart.

"I m-m-must go back and look after the c-c-cabin," he said.

"Wouldn't it be safe for me to go with you?" Mr. Fowler asked, breaking a long silence.

"You're s-s-safer here."

"I don't see why. You've got a good defence built there, and I could help you defend it."

"Against the Injuns, yes," returned Lem. "But you've got other enemies. If the s-s-scouts came and ordered us to g-g-give you up, what could we d-d-do?"

"You could serve 'em as you serve the Injuns," said Fowler.

"Would you have me do that? W-w-would you draw your whole f-f-family into a war with the m-m-men who're really our best f-f-friends?"

Fowler was silent a moment, and then, to Lem's surprise, answered in an altered tone:

"You're a good boy, Lemuel, and a brave boy. Do everything as you think best, and I'll do as you say. I've been a fool all my life, and I'm finding out what a brave boy I've got now it's too late."

Lem's heart swelled with hope—the hope that he was winning what he had missed so bitterly—a father's confidence and love. But not to push a matter which might ripen too fast, he remained silent until ready to leave the hiding place. Then he said:

"I will send you word when I think it safe to m-m-make any change. Nipmuck will serve as m-m-messenger atween us, and you can trust him in every way. M-m-may God watch over you!"

They clasped hands as they had never done before and parted in silence. Then Lem went forth from the cave, waited outside to listen for a minute, and then clambered to the top of the precipice.

Making his way cautiously through the black-berry briars near the crest of the hill, he soon became conscious of rapidly approaching footsteps.

The youth had barely time to crouch in a dense thicket when a man rushed past in headlong flight, not heeding the lacerating briars or steepness of the ascent.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OTHER SCOUT.

The moon had not yet risen, but the sky was clear, and where there were no trees to cast their shadows one might readily recognize a face or form that had been seen before.

The man that rushed past the thicket where Lem Fowler was hiding was Solomon Wheeler, the same, who, as a pretended fugitive settler, sought refuge in the Fowler cabin, and whose ruse had been disclosed by Lem's shrewdness.

There was no pretence about the man's present efforts. Every feature of his big, coarse face, every motion of his lank limbs bespoke the wildest terror. He did not seem to know that the ascent was steep, although he panted breathlessly. His clothes were torn by clinging thorns, while his feet, now bare, must have been painfully lacerated at every step.

Solomon Wheeler was closely pressed by a pursuer, who likewise rushed past the thicket. The pursuer was one of the Connecticut valley scouts, the comrade of Dan Clayton. With his long rifle tightly grasped in one hand, he tore through the trailing undergrowth, gaining on the fugitive at every step.

Lem instinctively knew what the issue would be, and with the thought that it might have been his father in the fugitive's place, he started up the slope in the tracks of the scout, with a fascinating desire to behold the struggle. There were no trees or other objects to obstruct the view, and the youth

could hardly have avoided witnessing what occurred if he wished to do so.

Solomon Wheeler strove frantically to reach the summit of the ascent, though what he intended to do in the event of succeeding, it would be hard to conjecture. But he soon saw that he could not reach it. Then he faced about, and held up his hands in an appeal for mercy.

The scout did not pause until he was within a dozen paces of the fugitive. Then his long rifle was leveled, and as Wheeler turned again to fly, in the desperation that prompts hopeless action at such a time, the loud report of the weapon rang with startling sharpness on the air. Lem saw the victim pitch forward upon his face, uttering not a sound. He saw the scout advance toward the fallen man, leisurely drawing a knife. Divining his purpose, the youth turned and hurried down the slope, not venturing to look backward again until he heard heavy rapid strides in his rear, and a gruff command to halt.

"Give an account of yourself, young chap," said the scout as Lem calmly waited for the other to come up with him.

"I l-l-live in a cabin down y-yonder," was the reply.

"Name Fowler?" the scout tersely inquired.

"I s-s-s'pose it is."

"You're the tall young chap I hear'n Clayton tell of. He said you was a brave one, and that a little trainin' would make a prime good scout of ye. You have a sort of go-ahead look about ye."

Lem was surprised that Dan Clayton should have given such a good account of him. But he resolved not to be thrown off his guard, for the tall scout might be only trying to win his confidence to the end of discovering the hiding-place of his father.

"If I hadn't f-f-folks to defend at h-h-home I

might jine the scouts—that is, if they thought I'd do," said Lem.

"Quite a family of ye, ain't there?" Carter pursued, deliberately loading his gun.

"Four boys of us and one g-g-girl."

"All of 'em big as you be?"

"No," and Lem smiled as he added, "I'm the biggest tater in the hill."

"That's right," and Carter nodded approvingly.

"Goin' home, was ye?" he added.

"Y-y-yes."

"Where ye been?"

"Reconnoitering a l-l-little. I s'pose the r-r-red-skins are likely to pay us a visit m-m-m-most any time, ain't they?"

"Hardly afore another night. There's a lot of 'em goin' to pass this way, and then lookout! You're a good ways from any fort here, or I'd advise you to make for one. There's straggling Injuns and Frenchmen all 'round us, and ye'd be likely, some of ye, to lose your scalps if ye started out now. Mebby you're better off where ye be, if you've got the grit to face it out."

"I've grit enough to do what I have to," said Lem.

"That's the talk," and Carter gave a yet more approving nod.

"Well, be keerful, and if I'm wanted to lend a hand I'll do it willingly," he added, turning away.

Lem had been intensely apprehensive all the while, lest the scout would make some mention of his father, and now when he saw the other moving away he was greatly relieved. But the very next moment the youth's heart sank again as Carter turned toward him again, exclaiming:

"I say—I was going to ax ye something."

Lem waited in breathless suspense, relieved only in the thought that it was too dark for the scout to see how pale he was.

"I don't s'pose you have the least idee where your father is gone to?"

"He n-n-n-ever t-t-takes me into his c-c-confi-dence when he goes or comes," stammered Lem, with hardly a hope that the watchful scout would accept this evasion.

"So Clayton was sayin'," the other returned, with no sign of suspicion. "He said we wasn't to hold the family answerable for what the old man is guilty of," Carter added.

"C-C-Clayton told you that?" Lem asked, more surprised than ever.

"Yes. He went to see ye, you remember, and had some talk with ye, and he said you was a square, nice young chap, and that I wasn't to molest ye on any 'count. And Dan is sharp enough to know what is what."

The scout was gone again, and Lem was left to wonder at Dan Clayton's friendly interest, for what he had told his comrade could have been actuated only by the friendliest motives.

"I should almost think he meant to let father escape, if I didn't know that wasn't likely, Lem reflected, while he made his way slowly back toward the cabin in the clearing.

An hour later he was knocking for admittance on the gate of the stockade. He wondered that it had not been opened for him without a request, for he supposed himself to have been seen the moment he left the shadow of the forest.

A sudden fear that something was wrong within assailed him, when even his knock was not promptly answered, and he repeated the summons, this time using the stock of his gun with a force that could not well fail of a hearing.

There was an instant stir within, followed by a gruff demand of what was wanted. The voice of the speaker was unlike any Lem had ever heard before, and his alarm was proportionately increased.

He did not know whether to try further to gain admittance or not before learning who held possession of the cabin and defence.

Had it been attacked by French and Indians and the inmates overcome? Was it a stranger belonging to the force of the enemy on guard at the loophole he had made?

Such conjectures as these flashed through Lem Fowler's brain as he drew back from the gate. At the same moment the latter was flung quickly open and Rube stood before him, squinting and blinking his eyes.

Lem gave the boy a rousing shake, not wholly in sport.

"A p-p-pretty feller to leave on guard," he exclaimed. "You was s-s-sound asleep!"

"I don't see how I could have been asleep, standing up," protested Rube, rubbing his eyes in a rather crestfallen way.

"You didn't see me coming, and I had to kn-n-nock twice afore I made you hear," Lem returned.

"It ain't morning yet—is it?" Rube anxiously inquired.

"It would have been afore you'd woke up if I hadn't made all the noise I could. Where's S-S-Si?"

"In the house, abed."

"And they left you to g-g-guard the defence?"

"Winawis said there wa'n't much danger of Injuns coming nigh to-night, and they thought they'd better get some sleep while they had the chance."

"And you was s-s-sure you could keep your eyes as w-w-wide open as an owl's?"

"I don't think I was asleep, Lem—really. And, say," as Lem was about to enter the cabin, "I wish you wouldn't tell 'em! I'd never hear the last on 't from Si. He didn't think I'd have the courage to stand guard alone, and now that I've proved that I

did, I hate to have him get hold of something else to pester me about."

"You ought to be pestered," said Lem.

"Please don't, Lem—I wouldn't if 'twas you that did it. It's not fair to have so much to say 'bout jest an accident!"

But Lem was in no mood to show mercy in the direction in which it was besought. Almost as soon as the inmates of the dwelling were awakened, and the first glad greetings were exchanged, they were all put in possession of Rube's "accident." Rube himself kept out of the way as long as he could, and greatly to his relief, when Lem and Si returned to the lookout where he was standing, Si made only one drawling comment on the boy's carelessness.

"I say, Rube," he began in that tone which the younger brother always dreaded to hear.

"Well, what now?" was the impatient demand.

"Next time you take sentinel duty, you'd better have a loop-hole fixed, so's you can keep a lookout laying down. It's careless for ye to go to sleep standin' up—ain't it, Lem?"

To this Rube made no response, and for a time there was enough to talk about, so that he escaped further taunts. But of course he would not soon hear the last of it.

At the first sign of dawn Winawis arrived at the defence. Even his usually imperturbable face bore signs of weariness and anxiety.

"Danger come on all sides at the same time," he said, with more excitement than he often betrayed.

"Injuns again?" Lem suggested.

"Yes. And the Nipmuck fears for the safety of the father of his white brother."

"Be the s-s-scouts watchin' nigh"?

"Not the scouts alone, but the bad pale face with teeth like a wolf. It is he the scouts are watching, and he keeps near the hiding place. Winawis is

afraid the man with teeth like a wolf suspects where the cave is. If he does——”

The young Indian hesitated, and his hesitation was reflected by the anxious face of Lem.

“You think he’ll make for the s-s-same place to hide in?”

“Yes.”

“And then f-f-father would have enemies outside and another w-w-with him.”

“Yes. And if the man with the wolf teeth found that the scouts were sure to find him, he would betray your father.”

“So he w-w-would.” The culminating dangers impressed Si no less than they did the elder brothers. This discussion transpired outside the dwelling, and was not overheard by Sue or Mrs. Fowler. At this moment the former came out.

“The scout said he wouldn’t try very hard to find father,” she said, when informed of the increasing perils.

“And he said he couldn’t promise to spare him if they met,” added Si.

“I don’t believe that man is cruel—I don’t believe he could be,” protested Sue, so warmly that Lem looked at her with a curious sharpness.

“I hope he can’t be,” was Lem’s only comment however.

“Well, Nipmuck,” he said, after a short period of silence. “We d-d-depend upon you f-f-for advice. You must t-t-tell us what to do.”

“My brother asks for more than he understands,” said Winawis, gravely.

“You don’t know what to s-s-say, then?”

“Nipmuck can advise, but it may not be well to follow what he says. He will do all he can—he will watch. or run, or stand and use his bow or knife in defence of his brothers. He can do no more than that.”

“That’s so—you w-w-would do as much for us

as we would for ourselves. You're a friend worth having, Nipmuck."

Sue's kind voice echoed this praise, and the face of the young Indian brightened with pleasure. He was repaid for his devotion by their acknowledgment of it.

The sun was rising, with a film of red clouds hanging over his disc. For days no rain had fallen, and the leaves of the corn in the field drooped when the heat of the sun fell full upon them. The nights were damp and cool, as August nights sometimes are. But upon this morning Winawis, noticing the red clouds at sunrise, pointed at them and said:

"There will be rain before another sun."

"And will rain be good or bad for us?" asked Sue, who, like the others, began to regard the young Indian as a sort of oracle to be consulted with confidence upon every subject.

"It will make the night dark," was the reply.

"And the Injuns will have a better chance to attack us," said Si, who, as has been noted, usually apprehended the gloomy side of coming events before he did the brighter.

"Yes. But it will be more easy for you all to escape if you had to flee."

"Then you think we may be d-d-drove out, after all?"

"There is great danger, and it may, when the time comes, look best to leave the cabin if the night is very dark. But we must wait and see. The foe may not come."

"If the scouts would only come and help us fight the Indians we might win," said Sue.

"If we wasn't h-h-his'n they'd do that," said Lem.

"That would make no difference to Mr. Clayton—the one that was here," protested Sue, again showing warmth.

"He would do as much for us as he would if father were an honest settler."

"I don't b'lieve that," was Si's blunt retort. "Wait and see," he continued, as Sue was about to insist on the young scout's fidelity. "If that Dan Clayton means to do any great things for us, he'll find a chance. But you'll find he has other fish to fry. He was sent here to clean out that band of traders, and he'll do that, no matter what else happens."

Si's blunt speech uttered the secret opinion of all the others, even to Mr. Fowler and Rube. It was clear that Sue, calm and cautious though she was, was only a young woman with a heart ready to love, and confidence to be implicitly won, like all the bravest and truest of her sex. And the one winning these treasures would be certain of holding them against any assaults, no matter whether he were worthy or unworthy.

Winawis went away before midday, promising to return, in any event, at least an hour before sunset. Therefore, when the appointed hour came and the Nipmuck did not appear, the inmates of the little defence were filled with a new alarm.

"If there's t-t-trouble at the cave, I ought to be there," said Lem.

"And leave us?" faltered his mother.

"It isn't far m-m-ma'am, and you have a better chance than f-f-father does."

"That's so, Lemuel. Go, if you think best. Mebby you had better."

No other objection was raised. Winawis should have been there more than an hour ago, and there had surely something serious happened to detain him so long.

As Si opened the gate and Lem went out, he paused, held up his hand, and then said:

"It r-r-rains."

What began as a gentle sprinkle soon increased to a heavy, yet fitful downpour. The yard enclosed by the stockade, having no roof, became far from

an agreeable place for sentinel duty, and to keep guns and ammunition dry the boys left them in the house, but where, at the first alarm, they could dart in and get them.

There were moments when hardly a drop of rain fell. Then it would "shell down" again with a soft, roaring sound, and rendering it so dark outside that objects half-way between the cabin and forest could not be discerned.

An hour passed, and the inmates of the dwelling became accustomed to the darkness and the new dangers with which it might encompass them, and they began to hope that the apprehended attack from the Indians would not take place.

Sue was first to utter the hope, and in doing so seemed to signal the announcement of danger. Rube ran in with excited countenance. "I guess they're coming—the Injuns!" he cried, seizing a loaded gun and darting out again.

Sue followed. Mrs. Fowler remained to cover the light and reload the guns when they should be handed in.

Sue found Si in the act of taking aim through one of the loopholes, and as she came up he fired, and quickly withdrawing the gun handed it to her and took from her the loaded one which she had just brought. Rube fired an instant later, and peering out Sue beheld numerous shadowy forms rise up, as though out of the earth, and dash toward the defence. At the same time a hideous yell sounded on the air, as though a carnival of demons had begun—a yell that was repeated with indescribable intonations, and well calculated to paralyze with fear all who heard.

"Get the rest of the guns, Rube—quick!" cried Si; "and then go in and help load up. Sue is a better shot than you be. When you have 'em all loaded you and marm can come and we'll give 'em a broadside."

The Indians, when first observed, were half-way between forest and cabin, so they could be distinctly seen. Whether the shots fired had done them any damage or not it was impossible to tell. But in either event, they did not rush directly against the defence, making only a feint of doing so, and dancing and yelling instead.

A few of them fired at the stockade, and others, apparently, tried to do so and failed, probably because the priming of their weapons had become wet.

To keep one of those flint-lock firearms in shooting order in a pouring rain was not a simple thing to do, and it is not strange that many Indians carried a bow and quiver of arrows as well as musket.

The attacking redskins were ignorant of the number of foes they were assailing, and no doubt expected that several families were congregated there to garrison the stockade. It was not often that they had to attack an isolated cabin surrounded by such a substantial barrier, and that it was the work of a single family of boys they had not the least idea.

All this had been talked over by the Fowlers, and now that the decisive hour had come they were anxious to keep up the delusion, so far as the Indians were concerned, as long as possible.

When Rube returned with the guns the Indians had scarcely changed their position. They still darted hither and thither, uttering a succession of whoops that were echoed back from the forest with hideous repetitions. Mrs. Fowler came out with him. There were four in all, with two loaded guns apiece. There were ten loopholes, six of them facing the point of attack.

"Now," said Si, we'll all fire at the same time, and then change guns and fire again. Rube and I'll shoot from t'other two loopholes the second

time, so it'll look as if there was a man at each one and some to spare. All take good aim, and fire when I say the word."

They did as he suggested. A moment later the signal was given, and four guns were fired simultaneously, and as soon as the loaded weapons could be substituted for the unloaded the volley was repeated, this time from two loopholes from which shots had not been fired before.

The range was short, and the savages suffered severely by the double volley. To them it appeared as though at least a dozen men manned the stockade, and good marksmen at that.

With yells they retreated, carrying with them those who had fallen. They did not pause until they had reached the edge of the forest, and there they scattered into small groups, probably to discuss a plan of further attack.

"We've driven 'em back once, anyhow," said Si, as the others went into the house to reload the guns.

Sue soon returned and joined him.

"They won't give us another such a chance," she declared.

At that moment the rain poured down again, and even the faint view of the enemy outlined against the forest was shut out.

When it cleared again the Indians had disappeared entirely.

"It can't be they have beaten a retreat for good?" questioned Sue.

"It ain't likely," said Si, feeling a sense of sagacity at having his judgment appealed to.

"There's more'n fifty of 'em, I should think," he continued. "They'll be more careful, now they find we mean to make it hot for 'em, but they'll try to come up to us by some of their tricks, it's likely."

"I presume so. And this is the time when some-

one who has had experience fighting the Injuns would be the most help to us. If that scout that was here yesterday would only come now——”

Sue hesitated, blushing in the dark as she found that she could not hide from her brothers how often Dan Clayton came into her thoughts.

“He ain’t here, and you needn’t flatter yourself that he’ll trouble himself about us,” said Si impatiently.

Sue was silenced, but not so her thoughts. Had he not in the beginning manifested unswerving determination in his quest of Mr. Fowler, and had he not in response to her appeal softened in his speech and manner, and even promised to be as lenient as he could! Why should he do so unless her appeal had impressed him? And she remembered, too, with that pleasantly foolish thrill which the experience gives to every pure young heart, that Dan Clayton had taken her hand at the door, before riding away, and that there was a chivalrous admiration in his demeanor toward her which must at least have betokened a friendly regard.

“It would take more than that one scout to scare all them Injuns,” Si added, after an interval of silence.

Showers and lulls in the storm alternated several times, until at length, when it was raining hardest, and the vision could not penetrate a dozen yards beyond the wall of the defence, Rube suddenly seized Si’s arm, and exclaimed in a shrill whisper close to his ear:

“There’s an Injun got into the yard!”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT.

Rube Fowler's announcement was startling enough. Under cover of the darkness an Indian had crawled over the pickets of the stockade and was in the midst of its defenders. There might be more than one within ; there were, of course, others in the act of getting in, or about to make the attempt. The struggle was coming to very close quarters, and that they all were imminently threatened with the horrors of a hand-to-hand combat with their foes was a certainty that almost paralyzed Si Fowler's brain.

"Where is he?" Si demanded in the same cautious tone.

"I seen him drop from the top of the fence out near where it jines on to the cowshed," was the reply.

"Was there more than one?"

"I didn't see any other."

"We must shoot him afore he pounces on to us. He is up to some mischief, and there'll be more of 'em in here if we let him live."

The two boys crept toward the other side of the fence with their guns held ready for use. But when they reached the spot where Rube was sure he had seen the Indian drop to the ground not a living thing was in sight.

"I seen him—sure and plain as I see you," protested Rube when Si suggested that he had taken another nap standing up and had had a nightmare.

"Then his courage failed him and he crawled out again," said Si.

"That ain't likely, long as he didn't see you," retorted Rube, nettled at Si's evident doubt of his ability to "see straight."

"You better tell Sue," said Si.

Rube did so. The rain subsided at this juncture, and they were greatly relieved to find no signs of the Indians having approached the defence in any numbers, for there was nothing to shield them from observation except the gloom, and that was too uncertain in duration to permit them to take any very elaborate action.

That an Indian had gained admittance to the stockade, however, Rube was ready to assert with any degree of solemnity required.

"Sure as I live and breathe I seen him as plain as I see you now," he declared for about the twentieth time after he and Si had made a thorough examination of the premises.

In the midst of their bewildered discussion of the events the gloom closed in upon them again and down came the rain in the heaviest torrent that had descended yet.

"If there is an Injun inside, now is the time for him to do the mischief he means to try," declared Si.

Sue remained near the gate to guard that, Rube was stationed where Si had been before, and Silas went to the place of Rube at the point where the redskin was believed to be in hiding. That he did not feel at all comfortable in doing so must be admitted; but the post of danger must be occupied by someone, and he felt that he was more trustworthy than Rube, and better able to withstand an attack, if one were made, than Sue.

So he stood his ground resolutely, keeping a rather sharper lookout within than without. His vigilance was soon rewarded by the sight of a tall figure in the act of dropping from the roof of the dwelling into the yard.

Quick as a flash the youth raised his gun and pulled the trigger. But no report followed: the powder in the pan was damp; the weapon had missed fire. But the one aimed at had dropped nimbly to the ground, and would probably have avoided the shot had the gun not missed. He was up again in an instant, and, as Si ran towards Rube, calling for another gun, he was brought to a standstill by a voice that was certainly not an Indian's.

"Not so fast, youngster; ye can do better'n to waste your powder on me!"

A cry of joy came from Sue; she recognized the voice and the figure, though she had heard and seen them but twice before.

"Dan Clayton, the scout!" she cried—and she was right.

"You would have filled me chock full of bullets if I hadn't got in on the sly," he said, in explanation of his manner of entering the defence.

"And after I was in I thought I'd play a little joke on you, to show how easy the Indians could play the same trick," he continued.

"I seen you when you got in," said Rube.

"I reckoned you did, and so it was the more fun for me to puzzle ye."

The scout spoke in a easy tone, and even laughed quite heartily at his own exploit, and yet a close observer would have seen that he was far from feeling the levity which he pretended.

"But we haven't much time for jokes jest now," he said, more gravely. "I think the time has come for you to make a little change in your tactics. I came to see if I couldn't help you out a little."

"With you to help us we could keep back a good many Injuns, I'm sure," said Sue.

"Likely enough, miss; but I ain't much good at inside fighting; I'm better outdoors, 'mong the trees and brooks, and to tell the truth, they ain't all In-

juns out yonder ; some of 'em is Frenchmen, and one of them is worth a dozen redskins at storming a stockade like your'n."

"Then you think they'll get in in spite of us all?"

"I don't say as I think they would, but I'm afeared on't. And on the whole, I guess I've a better plan for you, and the quicker we're about it the better. If you and your marm didn't wear petticoats, now—"

Si interrupted. "That's what Lem said t'other night," he exclaimed. "And," he continued, "I told 'em that they might rig up in some of Lem's and my old clothes if it come to a pinch."

"Just the idea," declared the scout, and it seemed to Sue, somehow, that he was now uttering a command which she must not disregard.

"Hustle on some men's clothes—that's the way to do. Then you can pull through with half the risk, and my hoss will know what to do with ye!"

"Then your horse is with you?" Si asked in surprise, while Sue went in with her mother to make the suggested change of clothing.

"Out in the corn field lying down," declared Clayton. "He'll stay there till I tell him to get up. That's the kind of a hoss he is." And this was the only question he gave them time to ask.

He kept them all going from one thing to another, in obedience to terse commands. He did sentinel duty the while, and it was certain that nothing escaped his keen, matchless vision. "All ready?" he presently asked.

"Yes," Sue answered. She stood in the doorway with her mother, and Davey snuggled in her arms, and even in the gloom it could be seen that they cut a rather ludicrous figure. Mrs. Fowler had a matronly amplitude of form that it was not easy to disguise, even with cast-off clothing of her husband's. Sue was too tall for Si's clothes and too short for Lem's, but she compromised the matter

by using Lem's breeches and Si's jerkin, which altogether fitted her better than anything else that could have been improvised at such short notice.

"No time for admiration or compliments," declared Clayton, who had a way of not giving them a chance to be apprehensive concerning the step they were taking.

"Now," he continued, "you boys take a gun apiece, and ammunition enough to last a few days, and grit enough to last till morning, and away we go. It's coming on to rain like smoke pretty soon, and it is dark as a pocket now, so we must make the most of it. We want to get to the cornfield afore it brightens up again."

The gate was opened and the little partly filed forth, Clayton leading the way. It began to pour at the same moment and they could hardly see their hands before them. They hurried on through the gloom and soon felt the soft loam of the ploughed field under their feet. There were pools of water at every step, and the heavy rain would obliterate their tracks almost as soon as made.

"Halt," said the scout in a whisper. "Here's the hoss."

"That hoss would lay and soak in a puddle for a week if I didn't come along to tell him to git up," declared Dan Clayton, still keeping off fear with cheerful speech and fearless manner. At the same time he pulled gently at the animal's bridle, said, "Easy, Jim, easy now," and almost without a sound the horse got upon his feet. Si noticed that something was tied upon the animal's hoofs to muffle his footsteps, and at the same time he realized that this young scout had spared no precaution from the beginning. He far better than the others realized the great danger they were in, and he feared that if they did realize it they would not be so cool and obedient in all things. Everything depended on keeping them perfectly cool.

"If the Injuns had come along and found this hoss, they'd a thought he was dead, or goin' to die, and gone on and left him. He wouldn't get up for them if they'd kicked his ribs in. That's the kind of a hoss he is."

Thus Clayton ran on in his cautious tones, while he helped Mrs. Fowler and Sue upon the animal's back. The saddle was large, and, of course, they did not scruple to get on astride. Davey was placed between them; the bridle rein was given to Sue, who sat in front. But Clayton kept hold of the bit and led the horse slowly betwixt the rows of corn until they reached the edge of the wood. Rube and Si followed behind the scout, and all of them were breathless with the suspense of their situation and rapidity of movement, for Clayton did not allow them to pause for an instant.

"Now, if we can only get to the brook, and cross that, we're all right," he declared, in his cheerful tone.

He continued to lead the horse for some distance, and the boys wondered how he knew he was keeping in the right direction. He was soon to tell them, however, how they could keep in a comparatively straight line, in spite of the darkness and absence of landmarks.

He suddenly brought them to a standstill, and held up one hand as a sign for silence. The horse seemed to understand the signal as well as the riders, and they could not even hear his breathing.

It was raining softly then, and the drops made a soft, pattering sound on the leaves overhead. A very little wind was blowing, with a whirring sound in the foliage.

Si, looking in the same direction as the scout, was startled to see a shadowy form moving across their path with rapid, silent strides. It was the form of an Indian, and he felt sure that they were discovered. To his surprise, however, the foe passed on,

and when he disappeared Clayton whispered : " You just wait here a minute, and I'll see that he keeps on out of our way. I could shoot him easy enough, but shooting makes too much noise. Now, on any account, don't ye stir till I get back."

He was not gone long, and when he returned he only said : " Forward, and mighty careful."

Thus, making frequent halts to listen, and the scout several times going on in advance to reconnoiter, the fugitives kept on for what seemed to them a long distance. In reality they had gone but little more than a mile when they found themselves on the sloping bank of the small stream to which frequent allusion has been made.

" It isn't very deep and the hoss will wade across easy as can be, and so can you boys. Ye won't need to turn up the legs of your breeches, because they're about as wet now as you can get 'em."

The scout stepped into the water first, for the horse to follow, but suddenly stepped back again and backed the animal quickly into the midst of a dense thicket.

" Now, for your lives, don't one of you sneeze," he warned, giving, as usual, a pleasing turn to their peril.

The words had barely passed his lips when they heard, in the lull of the storm, the dip of a paddle. They huddled closer together, actually holding their breaths as a long canoe, paddled by two stalwart redskins and filled with white men, came around a bend in the river and turned its prow toward the bank near the spot where they were standing.

Clayton had selected an easy place for descending the bank to the water's edge, and the same point attracted the enemy as a good landing.

As the canoe crept toward the shore the rain suddenly descended in one of those sudden down-pours which had characterized the storm. This

rendered the darkness much more intense, and almost shut the canoe from the sight of the anxious fugitives.

They faintly heard a quick order by one of the white men, then the grounding of the craft.

The occupants sprang out, the Indians quickly drew up the canoe, turned it upside down, and then pushed it into the very thicket where the fugitives were hiding.

Had the rain ceased at that moment discovery could not have been avoided. But for the example of Dan Clayton the others would not have had the nerve to remain motionless. Yet the recoiling of a single step, with the snapping of a twig, or a quick-drawn breath, would have been fatal. The scout had correctly estimated the chances of discovery. He knew they were invisible to the Indians and if nothing happened to excite their suspicions there was no reason to expect them to penetrate the thicket. In another moment they turned away, and, led by the two redskins, the whole party filed off along a forest path.

Not until the sounds of their footsteps had died away did Clayton again venture to move forward. But this time there was no interruption, and they were soon on the opposite side of the stream.

Withdrawing into another thicket, they waited for the scout to make another reconnoissance in advance.

"The coast seems to be clear ahead," he announced on returning.

They ascended a considerable slope, up from the brook, and when they had reached the top Clayton brought them to a pause and pointed back in the direction whence they had come.

"See there!" he exclaimed.

There was a red glow on the vapor-laden air, and as they gazed they saw a tongue of flame leap up-

ward. It was their cabin, the roof of which was on fire.

But as they looked it was shut out by the pouring rain, and when the next lull came the glow had subsided.

"They can't burn it all up if they try," declared the scout. "The rain will discourage 'em in that business, so long as there ain't any palefaces to drive out by the means. But it looks as if we got out about the right time. They didn't know we'd gone, and yet they managed to get in somehow. They'd manage jest the same if we'd been there."

"You saved our lives," said Sue, in a low, grateful voice. And Si and Rube were not disposed now to disparage the young scout, who, it seemed to them, was the wisest and most invincible man in the world.

"Well, I calculate you can do without me for a while," he added.

"Are you going to leave us?" Si anxiously asked.

"Yes—but I won't take the hoss, and I'll tell ye how to keep on in a straight line. Hold up your hands, boys."

They obeyed.

"Feel the wind on 'em?" Clayton asked.

"Yes."

"Which way is it?"

"It blows in our faces."

"And it ain't likely to change for a couple of hours at least. So you're to keep it where it is now—blowing right in your faces. And you're to keep as still as I've shown you how to do, and you're to keep cool in any case. I don't think there are any Injuns so far this side of the brook. They're all on t'other side. You're to keep straight on till you reach another stream—a bigger one than this. And thereabouts is a 'campment of Colonial soldiers. If

you miss them, there's scouts with 'em that won't miss you, you may depend on't."

Clayton shook hands with them all, bade them good-by, and then went back over the track they had just traversed. And with anxious hearts the fugitives went forward as he had so plainly directed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END.

Strangely enough, Lem Fowler encountered no Indians on his way from the cabin to the hiding place of his father. The journey was singularly devoid of incident, although his apprehensions were none the less keen on that account.

Winawis had not returned as he had promised, and he would not fail from a slight cause. Therefore, Lem hurried through the forest, up the slope, with its rocks and briery thickets, and scarcely paused to take breath until the top of the precipitous descent was reached,

It was very dark, and had there been sufficient light nothing could have been ascertained on examination of the ground. The swift rainfall had obliterated every trail.

Before beginning a descent to the entrance of the cave Lem leaned over the declivity and strove with eye and ear to discover if all were as he had left it below. But he could see nothing, only the misty darkness, and hear nothing save the murmur of the stream and occasional dripping of water from overhanging branches.

When he regained his feet he was at first shocked, and then pleased, to see the figure of Winawis creeping toward him on hands and knees.

"Back, my brother—out of sight!" the Indian exclaimed in a shrill whisper.

Lem obeyed, and both had barely crept under the dripping, clinging blackberry vines when a tall white man came leisurely into view, pausing on the

crest of the hill. He seemed to listen, and then abruptly disappeared over the precipitous bank.

"Come," said Winawis hurriedly, "we must follow." And he lead the way, nimbly clambering down the steep descent, with Lem close above him. They had not gone half way to the cave before a gruff voice above them called ;

"Halt, there—all on ye !"

It was the voice of Carter, the scout, and Winawis set the example of obedience. Glancing downward, Lem saw that the good white man had reached the shelf of rock upon which the cave opened. The scout's command had been for him more than for the white and red youths.

Whether the treacherous fugitive had originally intended to descend to the base of the precipice could not be known, but it was clear that he would not be allowed to do so now. The scout covered him with his rifle. And then what Lem most dreaded occurred, and, as it afterward appeared, it was what Winawis had foreseen, and was the crisis which he had stayed there until that hour to avert.

The good white man had spied upon them and become possessed of the young Indian's secret. He knew where his late comrade, Fowler, was hiding, and now that there was no chance of his escaping from the relentless pursuer, he maliciously pushed back the shielding boulder and sprang into the opening, instead of passing by or remaining where he was, and permitting the other fugitive to remain in security.

Only Winawis' hand kept Lem from springing down in pursuit of the treacherous trader.

"You stay where ye be till I come down," said the scout, and in another moment he joined them.

"The Fowler boy ; friendly Injun," he remarked, glancing from one to the other. And then he added grimly :

"I've got that man in a hole now, and I calculate

there ain't any need of hurrying. I didn't notice there was a hole there when I climbed up afore dark. What're you doing here?"

"I was g-g-going to cross the brook," said Lem.

"Ye was, eh! But you was going to something else first, I reckon. Never mind, though, we'll jist go down and cage that white varmint, and I'll show ye how to earn a bounty, and not touch an Injun topknot, either."

Lem looked at Winawis, and the latter made a quick sign that the white youth understood. It meant, "We can throw him down the rocks and save your father!"

Lem closed his eyes for a single brief instant, to shut out the dreadful vision which the Indian's sign pictured. There was a fascinating temptation in it that he felt almost justified in yielding to. At the same time he thought that this scout was doing only what he had a right to do, and that in reality he was a friend and not a foe. It was not his fault that it was the father of Lemuel Fowler who had transgressed a strict law of the colony, and incurred the penalty which no doubt was deserved.

"No, no!" exclaimed Lem, in a husky but emphatic tone. Whether the scout noticed his utterance or understood what he meant, it was not clear, but he certainly took no notice of the words.

"Come along," he said, leading the way.

"Stay, stay!" and Lem seized the man's arm holding him back with frantic force.

"Well, what?" demanded the scout.

"There's more than one in that c-c-cave!"

"And who's t'other?"

"My f-f-father!"

"Sho!" The scout was silent a moment and then said:

"Wall, it ain't my fault if I've bagged two when I expected to git only one. But I won't touch his scalp. I'd hate to do that afore ye. And mind,

youngster, don't ye dare to interfere. If your dad makes a fight, you jest stand and let the best man win. That is all."

Down they went to the shell of rock, Lem moving as one seems to do in a nightmare, his brain benumbed with dread. Winawis reached the cave first, and found that the good white man had not even closed the opening. As the Indian paused before the entrance, he heard a rush of feet within and the sound of panting voices. At the same instant Mr. Fowler stepped out through the opening, and the Nipmuck saw he was being pushed by powerful arms in his rear.

Winawis only, in that terrible moment, fully comprehended the situation. The scout was indifferent as to the result of, and conflict between the two fugitives, even if he understood that one was going on, and Lem was too benumbed to see what was transpiring, or to interfere if he had seen.

The young Indian did not pause to count the risk. An agile leap, and he had seized the arms of the good white man, barely in time to prevent him from thrusting the half-fainting Fowler off the rocky shelf and down the fatal descent. The treacherous grasp was loosed, and the good white man, showing his teeth in that most vicious of smiles, recoiled from the opening, and before the Indian could spring aside, thrust a pistol close to his face and fired.

The Nipmuck's upraised hand thrust aside the pistol, but too late to escape the discharge. The hot blaze flashed across his eyes, and he fell back with a moan of pain.

The pistol was not the only weapon discharged at that moment, for the scout, seeing the Indian's danger, leveled and fired his own unerring weapon. The double report was followed by a strange stillness, that was broken only by a sudden downpour

of rain that fell soft and cool upon the scorched and blackened face of the young Indian.

Mr. Fowler had sunk down half-unconscious from fear and the reaction of his struggle with his former comrade. The scout glanced at him contemptuously, and then bent over the Nipmuck. Not until then did Lem stir from his position.

"A brave young redskin," commented the scout.

"Is he d-d dead?" Lem asked.

"No, and I calculate he'll live, too."

"What—what did he d-d-do?"

"Saved your dad from being throwed down the precipice by that vicious cuss inside."

Carter glanced at Mr. Fowler again and added :

"I reckon he's hardly worth shooting, and much less scalping. He's the last one of the bad lot, and we'll let him live if he wants ter. I shouldn't want ter if I was him."

Lem bent over his red friend, and when he saw how blackened was the swarthy face, a flood of tears filled his eyes, and his voice was choked as he said : "He saved his life."

"And I calculate the Injun can't tell night from day after this. A pity to lose such eyes as his'n." And even Carter's gruff tones were softened.

Carter, the scout, helped Lem to bear the young Indian down to the water's edge and across the stream. Mr. Fowler, upon realizing that his life was in no further hazard, summoned strength to accompany them, and when at last they halted in a natural opening, it was he who manifested the most skill in bathing and bandaging the Nipmuck's injuries.

No hand could have been gentler than his, and although he spoke hardly a word, the scout, by furtive glances at the miserable man's face, read a deeper suffering there than words could express.

"Mebbe he ought to live, after all," said Carter in a low tone to Lem.

For some time the latter hardly thought of the cabin and its inmates, so absorbing were present events, but at length he announced his purpose of returning.

"Yes, we must go and take care of mother and the children," Mr. Fowler quickly said.

"The woods are full of Injuns on that side of the brook," declared Carter.

"All the more reason for us to g-g-go back," returned Lem.

"Then I'll take ye the safest way. We'd get into a hornet's nest if we crossed at this p'int."

They made their way slowly up the stream, near the bank, and considerable time elapsed before they reached a place where Carter would let them cross. Then the question arose as to what should be done with Winawis.

While discussing the matter they heard a peculiar signal from a spot close at hand. Carter answered it; a moment after they were joined by Dan Clayton.

"Just what I came back for," he declared. "Ye needn't trouble to go back to the cabin. The folks are this side of the brook, and they'll soon be a mighty sight safer than we be here."

There were mutual explanations, and then, in spite of darkness and rain, they pushed on toward the place where, as Clayton had that day discovered, a company of Colonial troops on their way to reinforce the Stockbridge garrison were encamped.

The encampment was reached before daylight, and the greatest danger of the hour was over. They were all taken to Stockbridge together, where they remained until affairs on the Massachusetts border became more settled.

Because our story ends it does not signify that we have told all there is to tell, even of the frontier perils of this one family of pioneers. These boys of the backwoods were of too hardy a sort to settle down

in absolute security. Such as they it was who pushed the borders of civilization westward; and the story of such lives is too long for so short a tale as this.

But what was enacted toward reconciling to his family a wayward man has been told. And all that concerns the present interest can be briefly related from this point.

That a love affair sprang out of the acquaintance of Sue Fowler and Dan Clayton was a natural sequence. And then as now such affairs usually culminated with a wedding, but the weddings then were rather more rollicking in their festivities than is commonly the case in these days.

There were many guests and the bride got kisses that were welcome, and kisses that she would have got along without. There was a rousing dancing party, that did not break up until fiddlers and fiddles were too tired to furnish music. The parson did not join in their part of the entertainment, but when it came to passing round the rum and sugar, there was no impropriety in his partaking of a modest share. We should not think much of a parson who would do this at the present day.

When the bands of valley scouts broke up, as they did in a short time, Dan and Sue, joined by the Fowlers, set up homes in the Mohawk Valley.

There, with hardship and peril, prosperity and happiness came to them also, and it is such careers as theirs that go to make up the early history of our country.

On a gentle slope, overlooking the lovely valley of the Mohawk, sprung up a settlement of which Clayton's and the Fowler dwellings were the beginning. It was a fertile spot and the ringing sound of axes felling trees, and the report of guns killing game, perhaps marred the peace of nature, while it told of the industry and courage of men.

Lem, Si and Rube grew up together, and braved

together the toil and perils of the backwoods. Mr. Fowler, a trifle broken in spirit, was what he had never been before—a devoted father and husband—and out of their greatest trial sprang their most lasting joy.

As an inmate of their home, and constant companion of either Lem or Davey, was another whom we would not wish the reader to forget—one who, appreciating the green leaves of spring and the many-hued changes of autumn, and loving the glimmering streams and golden sunsets, yet saw them not. Brave, blind Winawis, the Nipmuck.

THE END.

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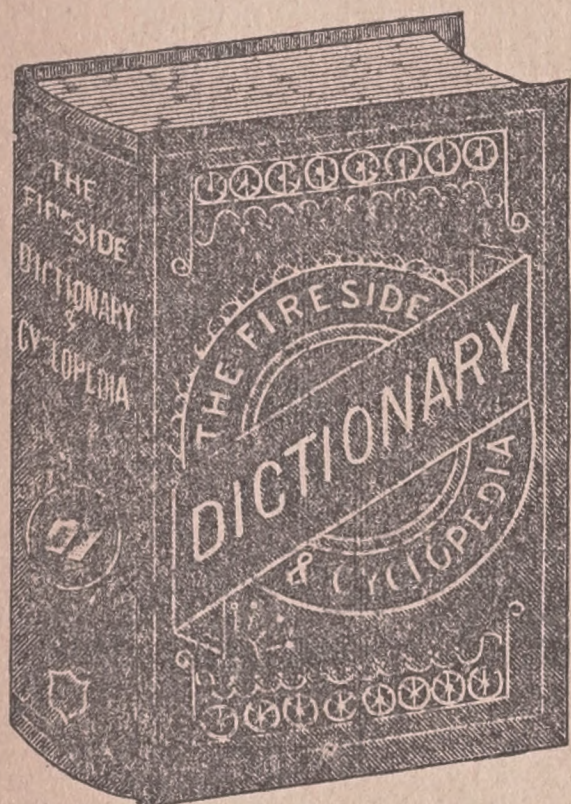
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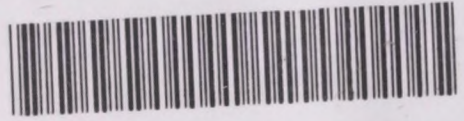
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